Feb 10, 2024

TechLife NEWS

BOOSTING THE GAME

EXPANDING APPLE'S GAMING ECOSYSTEM

SPATIAL COMPUTING

WHY APPLE PUSHES THE TERM WITH ITS HEADSET

MICROSOFT

CEO SATYA NADELLA CAPS A DECADE OF CHANGE & TREMENDOUS GROWTH

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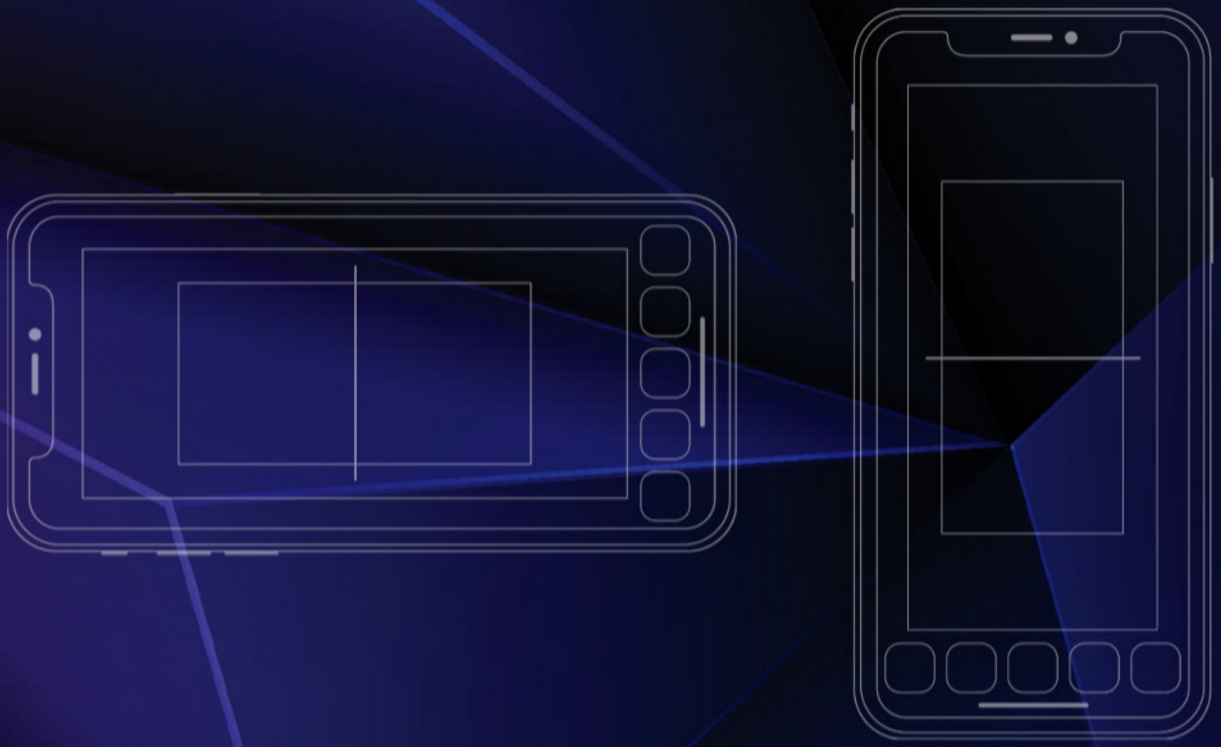

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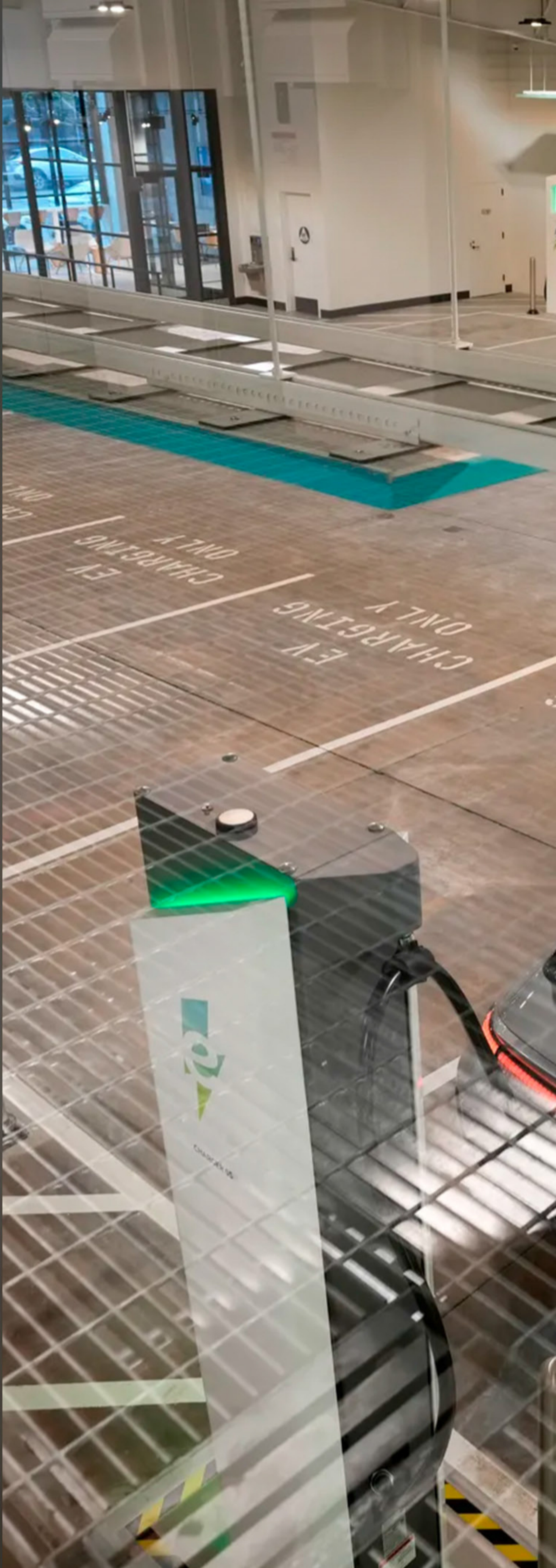
NEW INDOOR EV CHARGING STATION IN SAN FRANCISCO OFFERS A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE



A couple of blocks from the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, Electrify America is about to open an indoor charging station that lets drivers relax in a lounge while their electric vehicle batteries are being filled up.

The 20-plug direct-current fast-charging station, which opened for business Friday near downtown San Francisco, is part of a trend toward more appealing neighborhood stations, designed to serve EV owners who can't charge at their homes, as well as travelers or commuters who are low on juice.

It's also designed to allay fears among potential EV buyers that charging stations are too scarce or

EV
CHARGING
ONLY

that they will have no safe place to wait as their vehicles charge, spending far longer than it takes for a gasoline fill-up. EV sales growth in the United States is slowing, in large part because of similar concerns among potential buyers.

On Santa Monica Boulevard in Los Angeles, Tesla is building a combination drive-in restaurant, movie theater and charging station. Mercedes has built an outdoor station with an indoor lounge at the automaker's U.S. headquarters near Atlanta. The company plans to construct at least 400 more as part of a $1 billion investment to deploy 2,500 charging plugs, mainly on the coasts, by the end of the decade. Some of the stations will offer lounges. Others will be partnerships with malls or travel centers.

Electrify America's indoor station is intended to attract people who might be apprehensive about buying an EV, especially apartment dwellers in the nearby South Market neighborhood, said Robert Barrosa, the company's CEO.

"This is that big, indoor, premium experience that makes it enticing to to say, 'Hey, I can do this,'" Barrosa said.

Several convenience store chains have set up charging stations outside their businesses and offer food, restrooms and 24-hour service for EV owners.

But Barrosa said stations with nicer indoor space, including Wi-Fi and comfortable seating, are intended for a stay that's longer than a typical gas station fill-up. The San Francisco station, he said, will have an attendant around the clock for security and to handle waiting queues and answer questions from owners.

electrify america

At a minimum, it normally takes about 20 minutes at a fast-charger to replenish a battery from a 10% charge to 80%, EV owners say. That compares with just a few minutes to fill up a car at a gas station.

"We call it 30-minute retail as opposed to two-minute retail," said Rick Wilmer, CEO of ChargePoint, a company that builds and maintains charging stations for restaurants, stores and apartment buildings that use them to attract customers.

Convenience stores, Barrosa said, often have space for only a couple of charging plugs, meaning that there could be lines and longer waits for EV owners. Having 20 fast-charging 350-kilowatt plugs indoors is a confidence builder for owners, especially if they are in the neighborhood.

"People want the power, people want the speed," Barrosa said. "People want the technology."

Indoor stations also will help ease charging in poor weather conditions, a problem that arose recently when temperatures fell below zero in the Midwest.

Still, among the skeptics is Bruce Westlake, president of the Eastern Michigan Electric Vehicle Association, who owns two Teslas. He said he doesn't necessarily think charging stations with more amenities will become a big attraction for most EV owners.

Likewise, another Tesla owner, Kevin Smith of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, said of the new stations, "They're kind of a cool novelty thing, but I don't see them being mainstream."

When he travels, Smith often uses convenience stores for charging his EV.

"People just want a snack and a restroom," he said.

Smith said he would prefer if Electrify America, the largest fast-charging network in the country that is open to all EVs, would simply build more stations and make them more reliable.

There are more than 61,000 charging stations with over 163,000 plugs in the United States. Most are lower-speed chargers that require hours to fill up vehicles.

Tesla, with more than 2,100 stations and over 24,000 plugs, has the broadest fast-charging network. But it isn't open to all EVs, at least not yet. Electrify America has 900 stations and over 4,000 charging plugs.

President Joe Biden has set a goal of 500,000 EV charging stations nationwide, aided by $5 billion from the 2021 infrastructure law to install or upgrade chargers along 75,000 miles (120,000 kilometers) of highway.

Westlake said that when he travels, he normally plans his charging stops so they're near restaurants and other businesses. If he's charging locally, he'll do grocery shopping while charging.

But he sees the larger "destination" charging stations in neighborhoods as a big plus for apartment dwellers who don't have an option to charge at home.

"I would be nervous about buying an EV if I didn't have a garage to charge in," Westlake said. "That first step when you buy an EV is unnerving, to say the least."

Having 24-hour service is important to him, too, especially when charging at night. Sometimes, businesses near charging stations are closed, and there's no place to go while charging.

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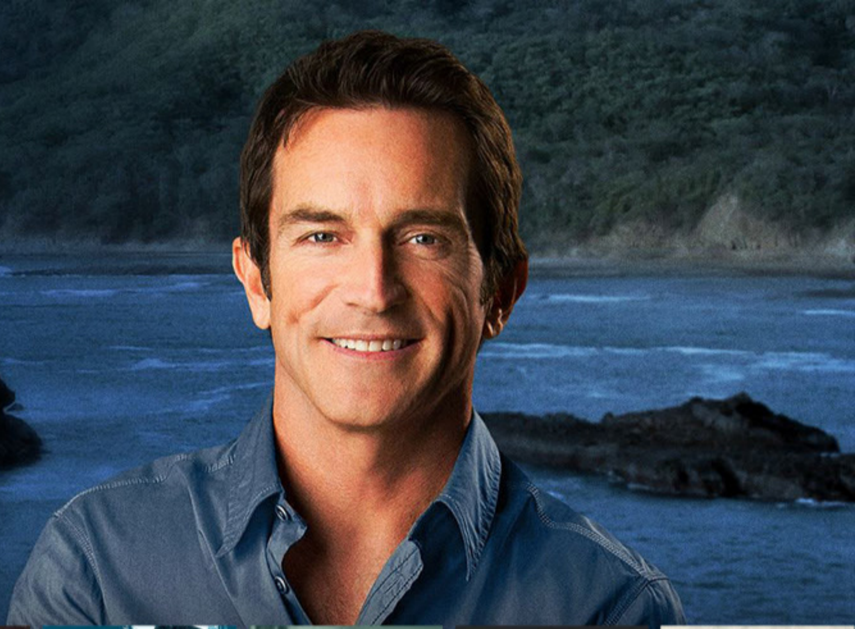

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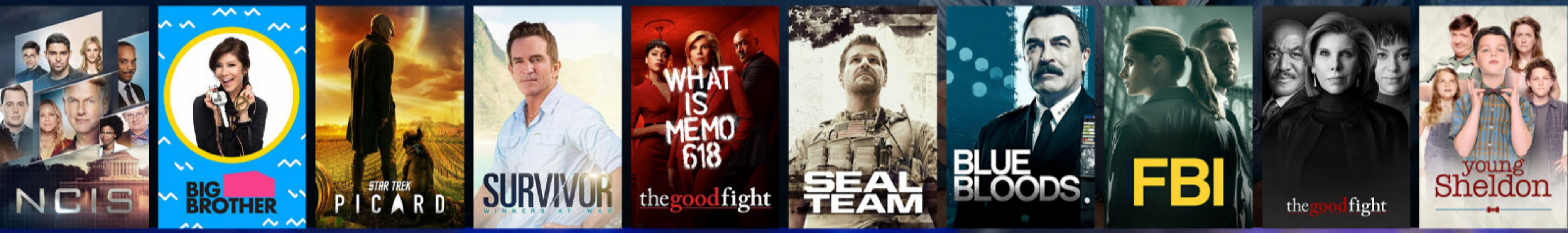
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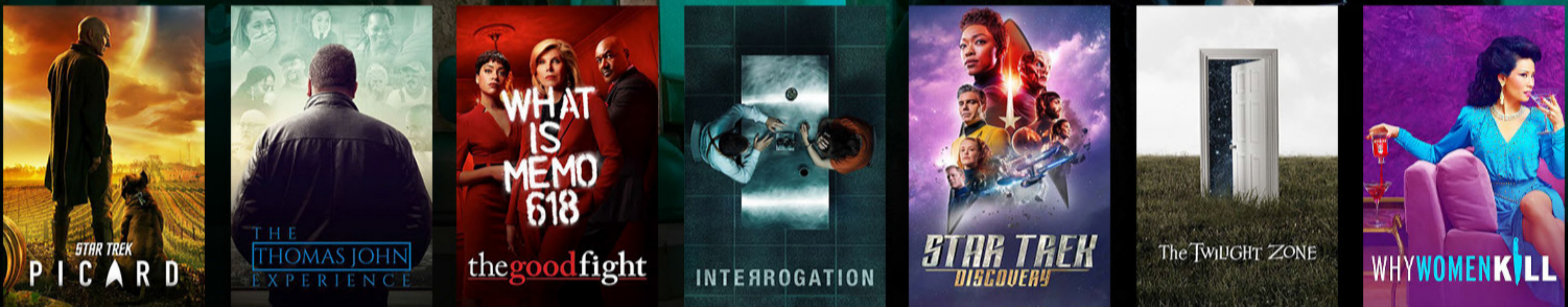
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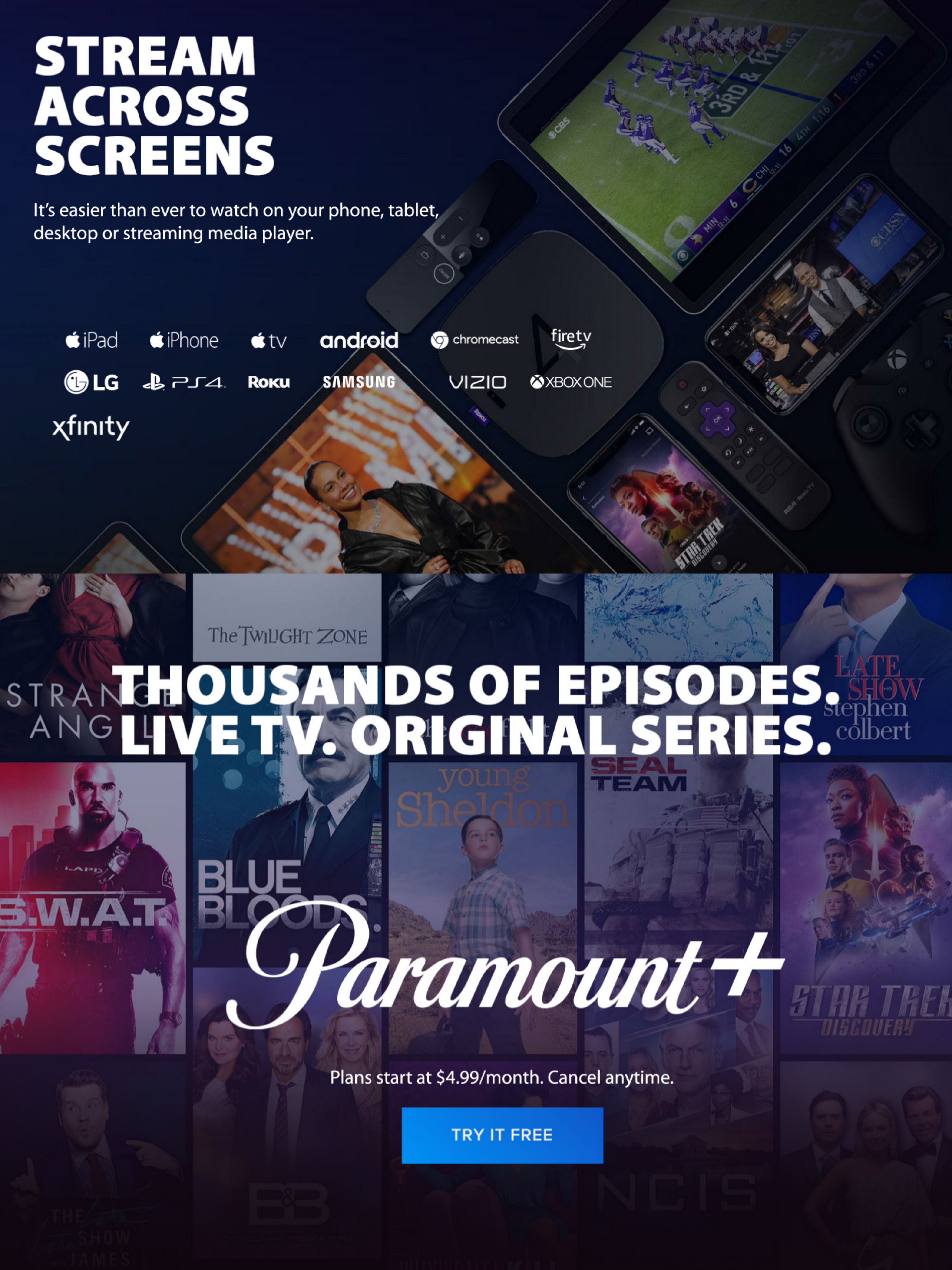
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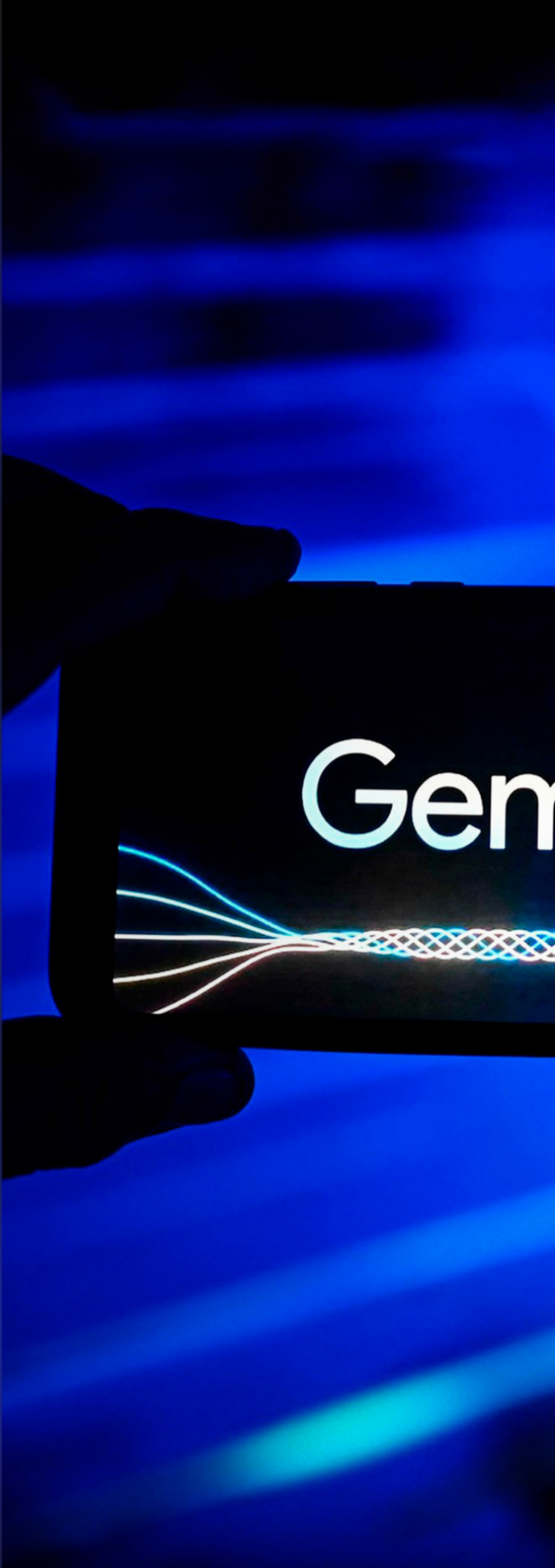


Google on Thursday introduced a free artificial intelligence app that will implant the technology on smartphones, enabling people to quickly connect to a digital brain that can write for them, interpret what they're reading and seeing, in addition to helping manage their lives.

With the advent of the Gemini app, named after an AI project unveiled late last year, Google will cast aside the Bard chatbot that it introduced a year ago in an effort to catch up with ChatGPT, the chatbot unleashed by the Microsoft-backed startup OpenAI in late 2022. Google is

nini
AI

immediately releasing a standalone Gemini app for smartphones running on its Android software.

In a few weeks, Google will put Gemini's features into its existing search app for iPhones, where Apple would prefer people rely on its Siri voice assistant for handling various tasks.

Although the Google voice assistant that has been available for years will stick around, company executives say they expect Gemini to become the main way users apply the technology to help them think, plan and create. It marks Google's next foray down a new and potentially perilous avenue while remaining focused on its founding goal "to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."

"We think this is one of the most profound ways we are going to advance our mission," Sissie Hsiao, a Google general manager overseeing Gemini, told reporters ahead of Thursday's announcement.

The Gemini app initially will be released in the U.S. in English before expanding to the Asia-Pacific region next week, with versions in Japanese and Korean.

Besides the free version of Gemini, Google will be selling an advanced service accessible through the new app for $20 a month. The Mountain View, California, company says it is such a sophisticated form of AI that will it be able to tutor students, provide computer programming tips to engineers, dream up ideas for projects, and then create the content for the suggestions a user likes best.

The Gemini Advanced option, which will be powered by an AI technology dubbed "Ultra 1.0,"

Google

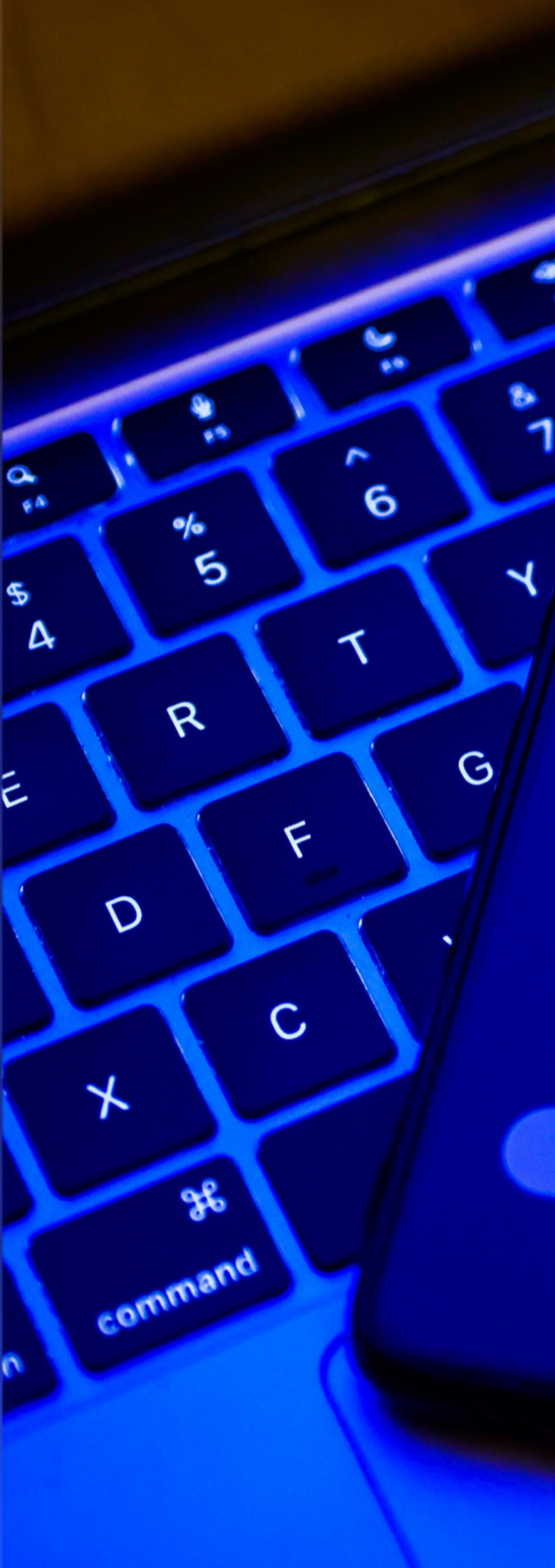
will seek to build upon the nearly 100 million worldwide subscribers that Google says it has attracted so far — most of whom pay $2 to $10 per month for additional storage to back up photos, documents and other digital material. The Gemini Advanced subscription will include 2 terabytes of storage that Google currently sells for $10 per month, meaning the company believes the AI technology is worth an additional $10 per month.

Google is offering a free two-month trial of Gemini Advanced to encourage people to try it out.

The rollout of the Gemini apps underscores the building moment to bring more AI to smartphones — devices that accompany people everywhere — as part of a trend Google began last fall when it released its latest Pixel smartphones and Samsung embraced last month with its latest Galaxy smartphones.

It also is likely to escalate the high-stakes AI showdown pitting Google against Microsoft, two of the world's most powerful companies jockeying to get the upper hand with a technology that could reshape work, entertainment and perhaps humanity itself. The battle already has contributed to a $2 trillion increase in the combined market value of Microsoft and Google's corporate parent, Alphabet Inc., since the end of 2022.

In a blog post, Google CEO Sundar Puchai predicted the technology underlying Gemini Advanced will be able to outthink even the smartest people when tackling many complex topics.



Google DeepMind
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“Ultra 1.0 is the first to outperform human experts on (massive multitask language understanding), which uses a combination of 57 subjects — including math, physics, history, law, medicine and ethics — to test knowledge and problem-solving abilities,” Pichai wrote.

But Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella made a point Wednesday of touting the capabilities of the ChatGPT-4 chatbot — a product released nearly a year ago after being trained by OpenAI on large-language models, or LLMs.

“We have the best model, today even,” Nadella asserted during an event in Mumbai, India. He then seemingly anticipated Gemini’s next-generation release, adding, “We’re waiting for the competition to arrive. It’ll arrive, I’m sure. But the fact is, that we have the most leading LLM out there.”

The introduction of increasingly sophisticated AI is amplifying fears that the technology will malfunction and misbehave on its own, or be manipulated by people for sinister purposes such as spreading misinformation in politics or to torment their enemies. That potential has already led to the passage of rules designed to police the use of AI in Europe, and spurred similar efforts in the U.S. and other countries.

Google says the next generation of Gemini products have undergone extensive testing to ensure they are safe and were built to adhere to its AI principles, which include being socially beneficial, avoiding unfair biases and being accountable to people.

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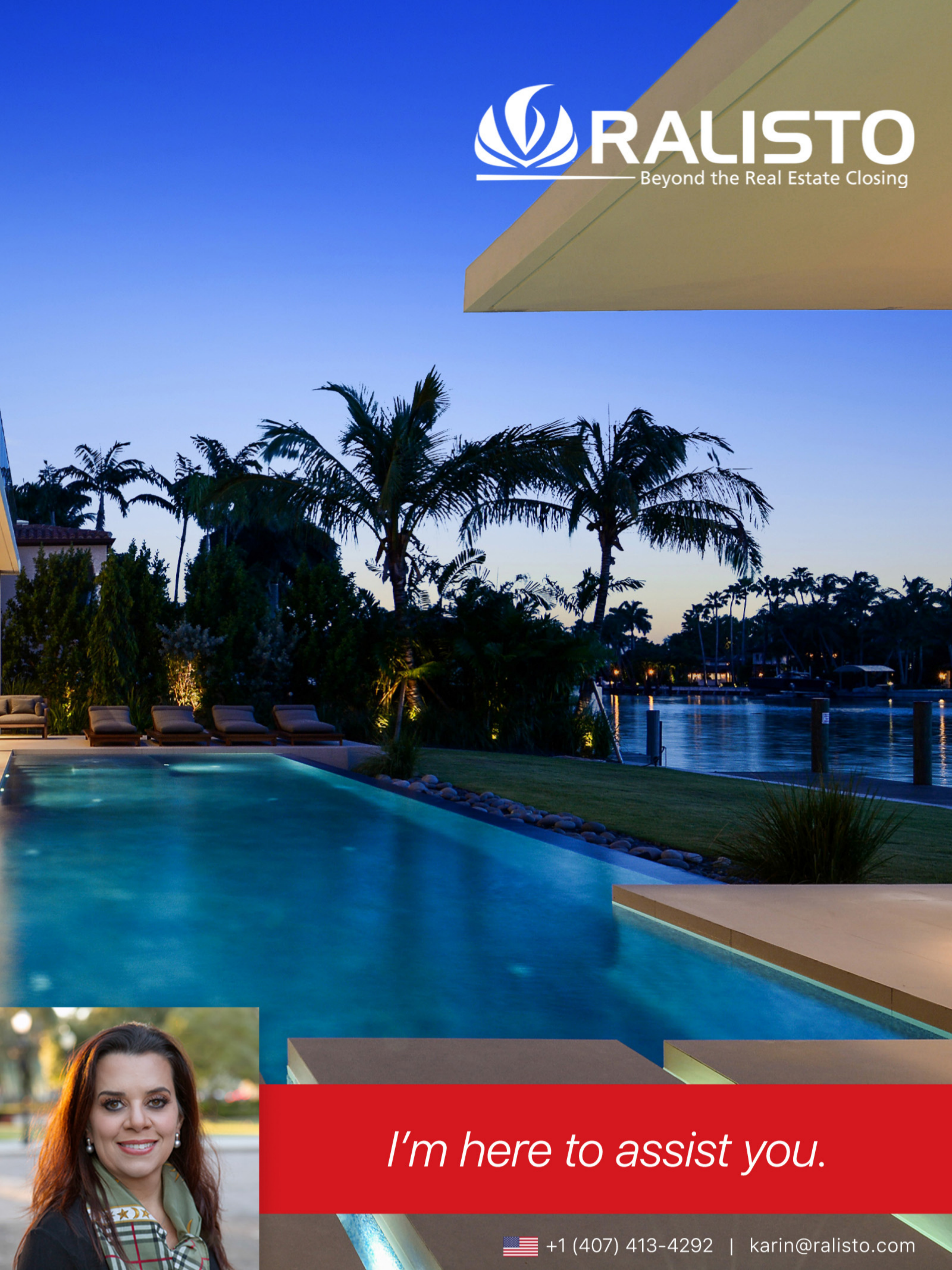

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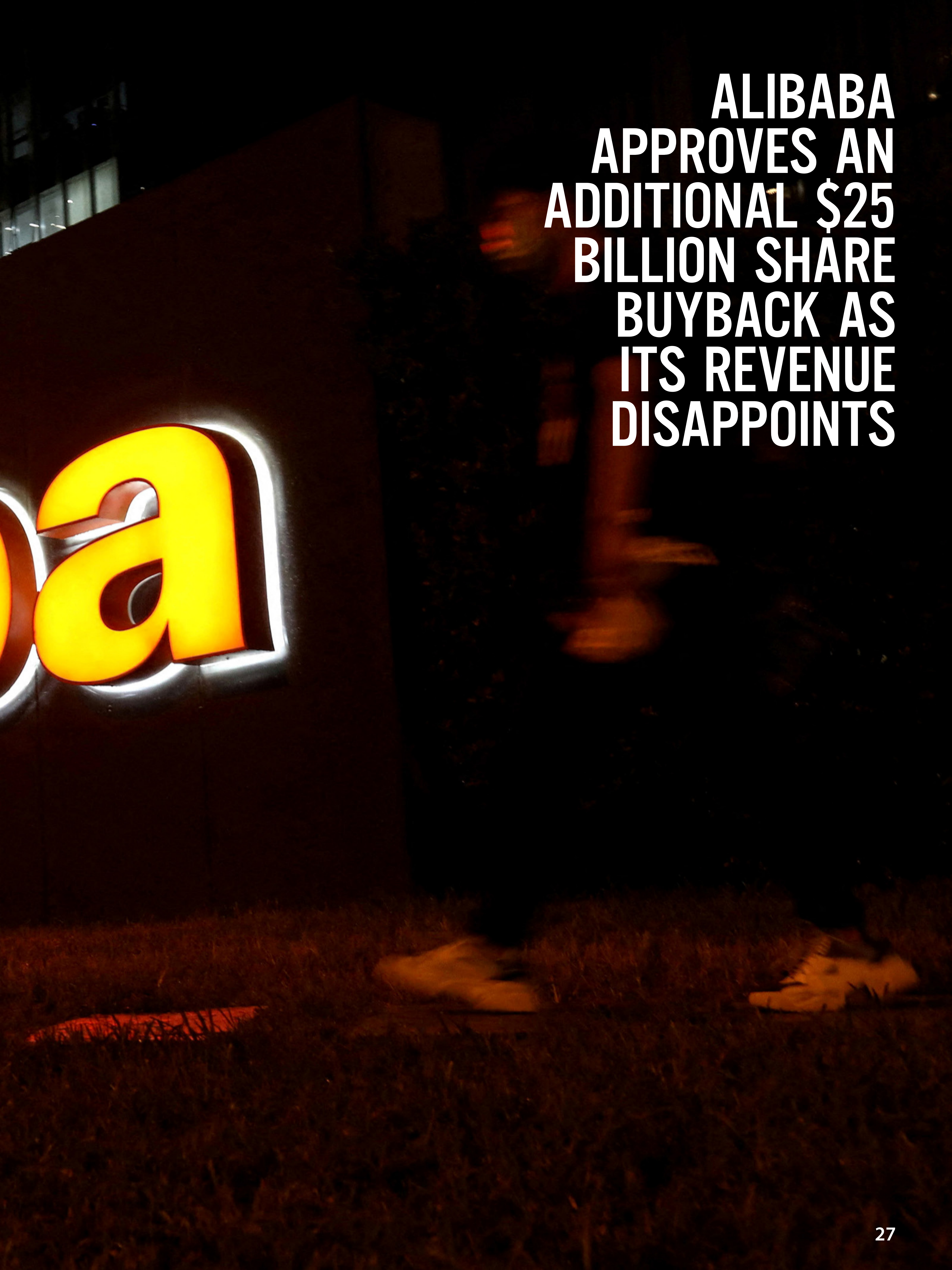

ALIBABA APPROVES AN ADDITIONAL $25 BILLION SHARE BUYBACK AS ITS REVENUE DISAPPOINTS

Alib

Chinese e-commerce firm Alibaba Group Holding on Wednesday approved an additional $25 billion authorization to its share buyback program, after reporting lower-than-expected sales revenue for the last quarter of 2023.

The company's Hong Kong-traded shares plunged 6.8% on Thursday. Alibaba's New York-listed stock price sank 5.9% on Wednesday and has fallen nearly 26% over the past year.

Alibaba posted a 5% increase in sales to 260.3 billion yuan ($36.67 billion) in the quarter that ended in December, slightly missing analysts' estimates. Net income sank to 14.4 billion yuan ($2 billion), down 77% compared to a year earlier.

The Hangzhou, China-based firm attributed the drastic decrease to declining values of its equity investments and falling revenues. Alibaba has struggled to sustain its growth and faces increasing competition in the e-commerce sector from rivals such as Pinduoduo and ByteDance, which operates TikTok and Douyin.

On a call with analysts, Alibaba chairman Joseph Tsai said that the company no longer plans to list shares in its logistics unit Cainiao and its Freshippo grocery business unit, given "challenging market conditions."

Earlier, the group scrapped plans to spin-off its cloud business, citing uncertainties over U.S. export curbs on advanced chips used for artificial intelligence.

Alibaba is looking to sell off some of its non-core holdings, including several retail operations, he said.

"We have a number of traditional physical retail businesses on our balance sheet, and these are not our core focus," Tsai said.

Aliba
Welco

The Hangzhou-based firm initially restructured its businesses in March, splitting them into six units that would eventually raise their own capital and go public to improve shareholder value.

Trying to rev up its growth, in December Alibaba named current CEO Eddie Wu as the new head of its e-commerce business, replacing longtime Alibaba executive Trudy Dai. That came weeks after rival PDD, which operates Pinduoduo, surpassed Alibaba in market value.

The company has struggled to recover following a regulatory crackdown on the technology industry in China and a $2.8 billion fine it had to pay after authorities deemed that it had violated antitrust regulations.

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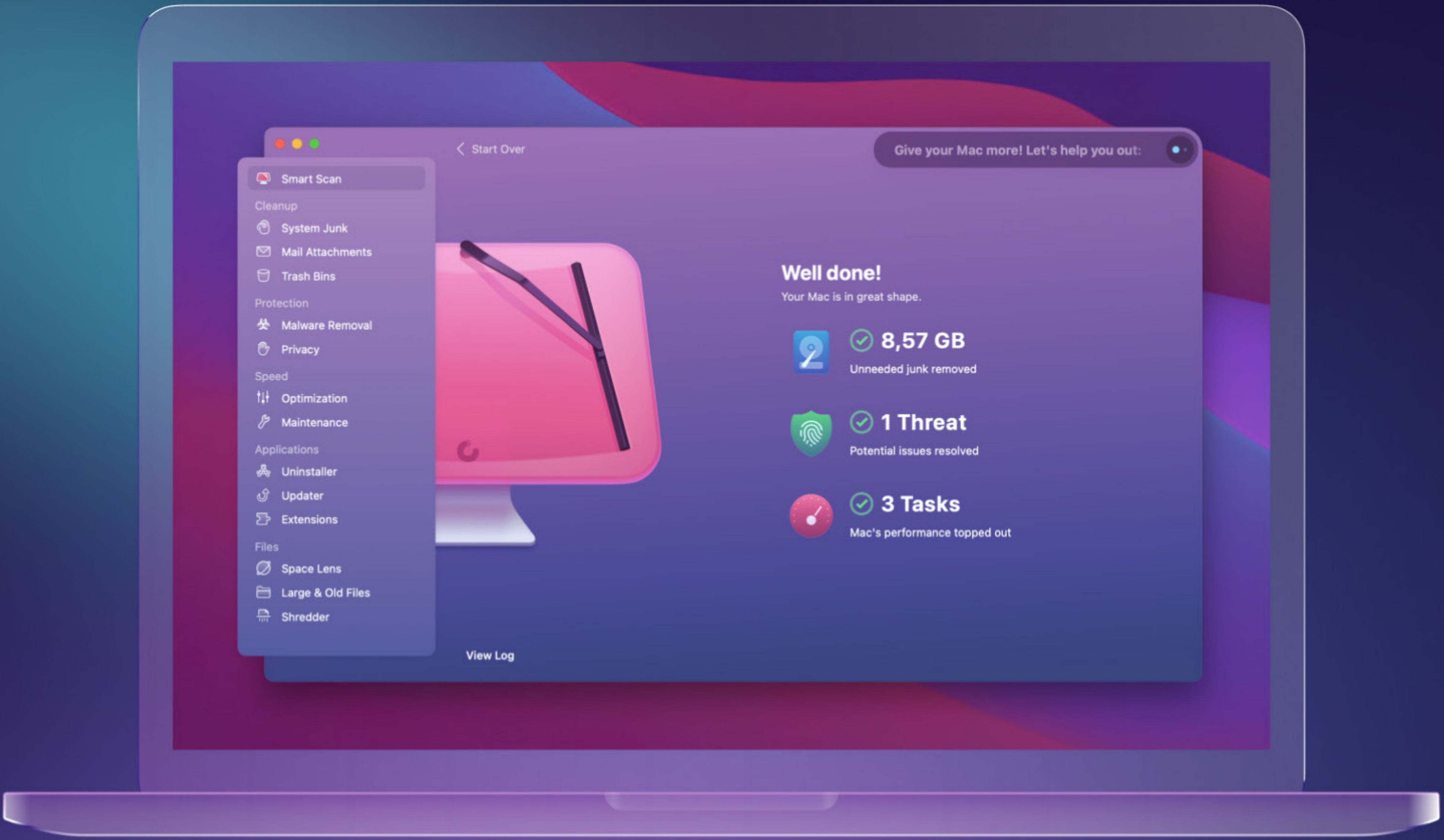

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IN A FIRST FOR UBER SINCE BECOMING A PUBLIC COMPANY, AN ANNUAL PROFIT

Uber posted its first full-year profit since going public in 2019 and its stock hit an all-time high Wednesday as strong bookings in the final quarter of the year pushed profit and revenue beyond Wall Street expectations.

Like its final year as a private company, the last time Uber turned a profit, it got a huge tailwind from investments that helped fuel profits, $1 billion in 2023. The difference is that Uber has started making money from operations.

“2023 was an inflection point for Uber,” said CEO Dara Khosrowshahi said in prepared remarks.

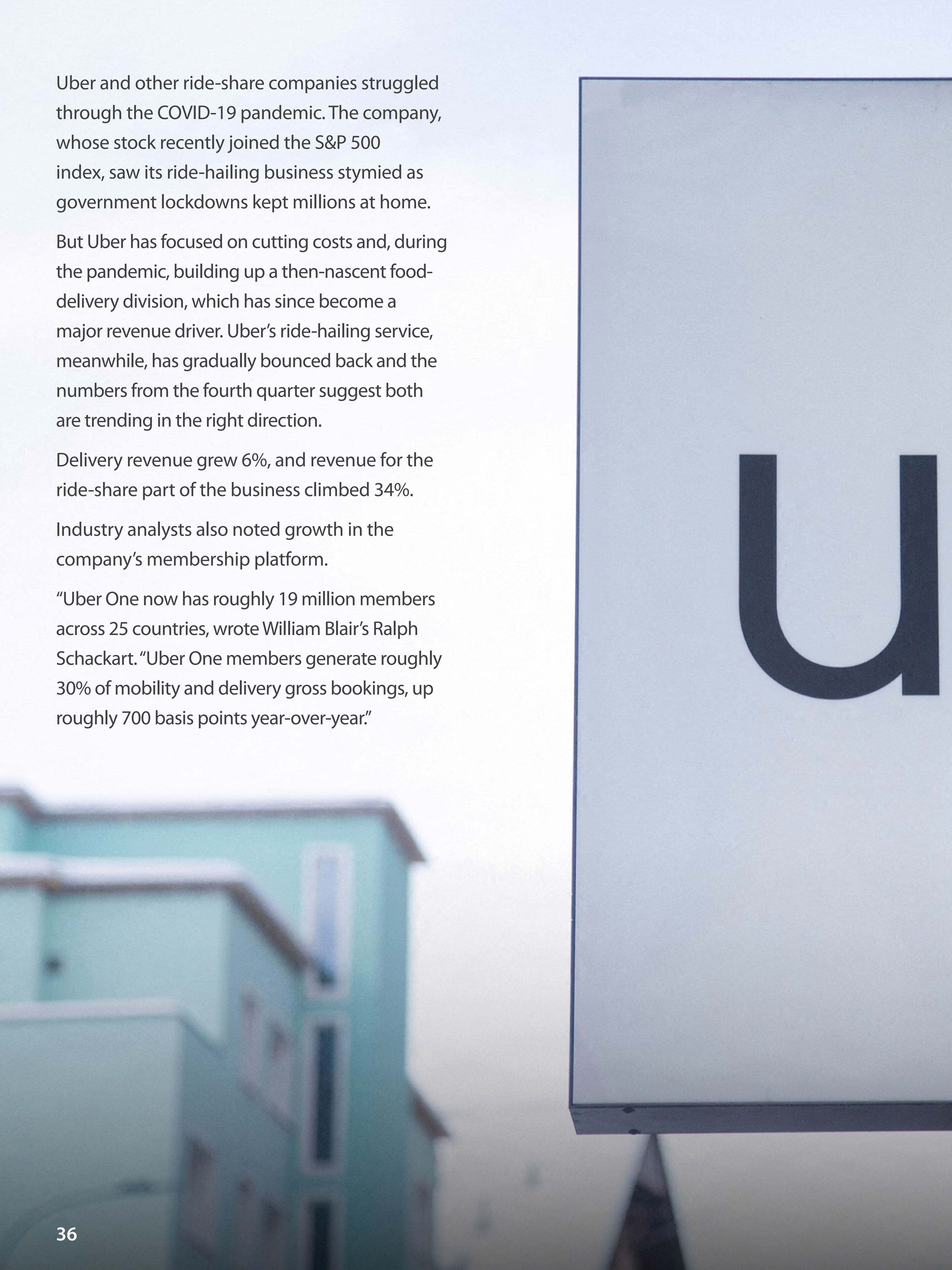
Uber and other ride-share companies struggled through the COVID-19 pandemic. The company, whose stock recently joined the S&P 500 index, saw its ride-hailing business stymied as government lockdowns kept millions at home.

But Uber has focused on cutting costs and, during the pandemic, building up a then-nascent food-delivery division, which has since become a major revenue driver. Uber's ride-hailing service, meanwhile, has gradually bounced back and the numbers from the fourth quarter suggest both are trending in the right direction.

Delivery revenue grew 6%, and revenue for the ride-share part of the business climbed 34%.

Industry analysts also noted growth in the company's membership platform.

"Uber One now has roughly 19 million members across 25 countries, wrote William Blair's Ralph Schackart. "Uber One members generate roughly 30% of mobility and delivery gross bookings, up roughly 700 basis points year-over-year."



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Uber earned $1.43 billion, or 66 cents per share, much better than the per share earnings of 15 cents that Wall Street had expected, according to analysts polled by Zacks Investment Research. The company earned $595 million, or 29 cents per share, in the same period last year.

Revenue totaled $9.94 billion, beating Wall Street projections for $9.75 billion.

Gross bookings surged 22% from the prior-year period to $37.6 billion.

For the year, Uber posted a profit of $1.89 billion, or 87 cents per share, on revenue of $37.28 billion.

“Our audiences are larger and more engaged than ever, with our platform powering an average of nearly 26 million daily trips last year,” Khosrowshahi said.

Last month Uber announced that it was shutting down alcohol delivery app Drizly at the end of March so that it could focus on its core Uber Eats strategy of helping consumers get almost anything on a single app.

Shares of Uber Technologies Inc., based in San Francisco, reaching an all-time high of $71.90 after the announcement.

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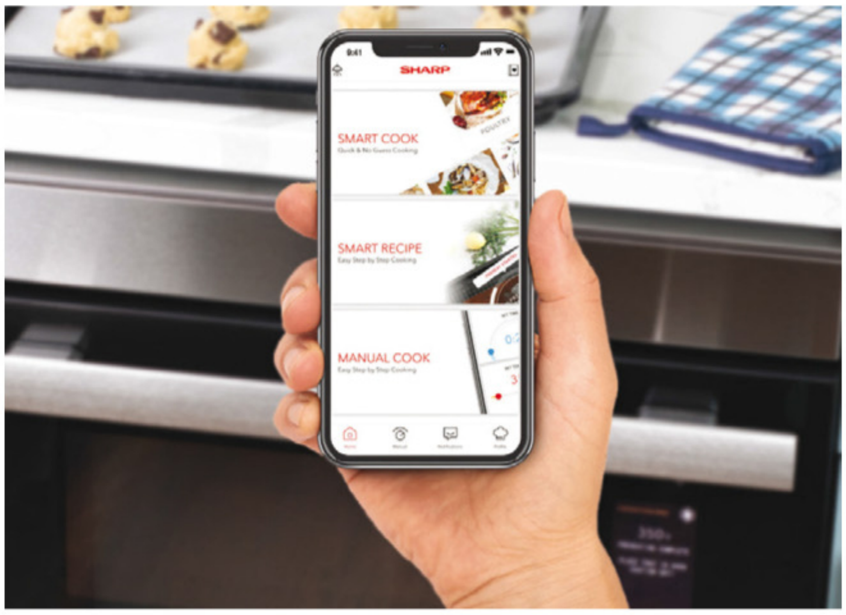

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Image: Jason Redmond

MICROSOFT CEO SATYA NADELLA CAPS A DECADE OF CHANGE AND TREMENDOUS GROWTH

Satya Nadella marks his tenth year as Microsoft CEO, capping a decade of stunning growth as he pivoted the slow-moving software giant into a laser focus on cloud computing and artificial intelligence.

Microsoft's stock has soared by more than 1,000% since Nadella took the helm in 2014, compared to the more gradual 185% growth of the broader S&P 500. Microsoft now has a market value of $3 trillion — more than any U.S. publicly traded company, including its longtime rival Apple.

Micros

"Nadella's had the biggest transformation of a tech company potentially ever," said Wedbush Securities analyst Daniel Ives. "The only one that would rival it was (Steve) Jobs coming back to Apple and turning it around with the iPhone."

Microsoft has created $2.8 trillion in shareholder wealth in the past decade, meaning an investor who bought a $10,000 stake in Microsoft at the time Nadella took over and did nothing with those shares, would have a stake worth about $113,000 now.

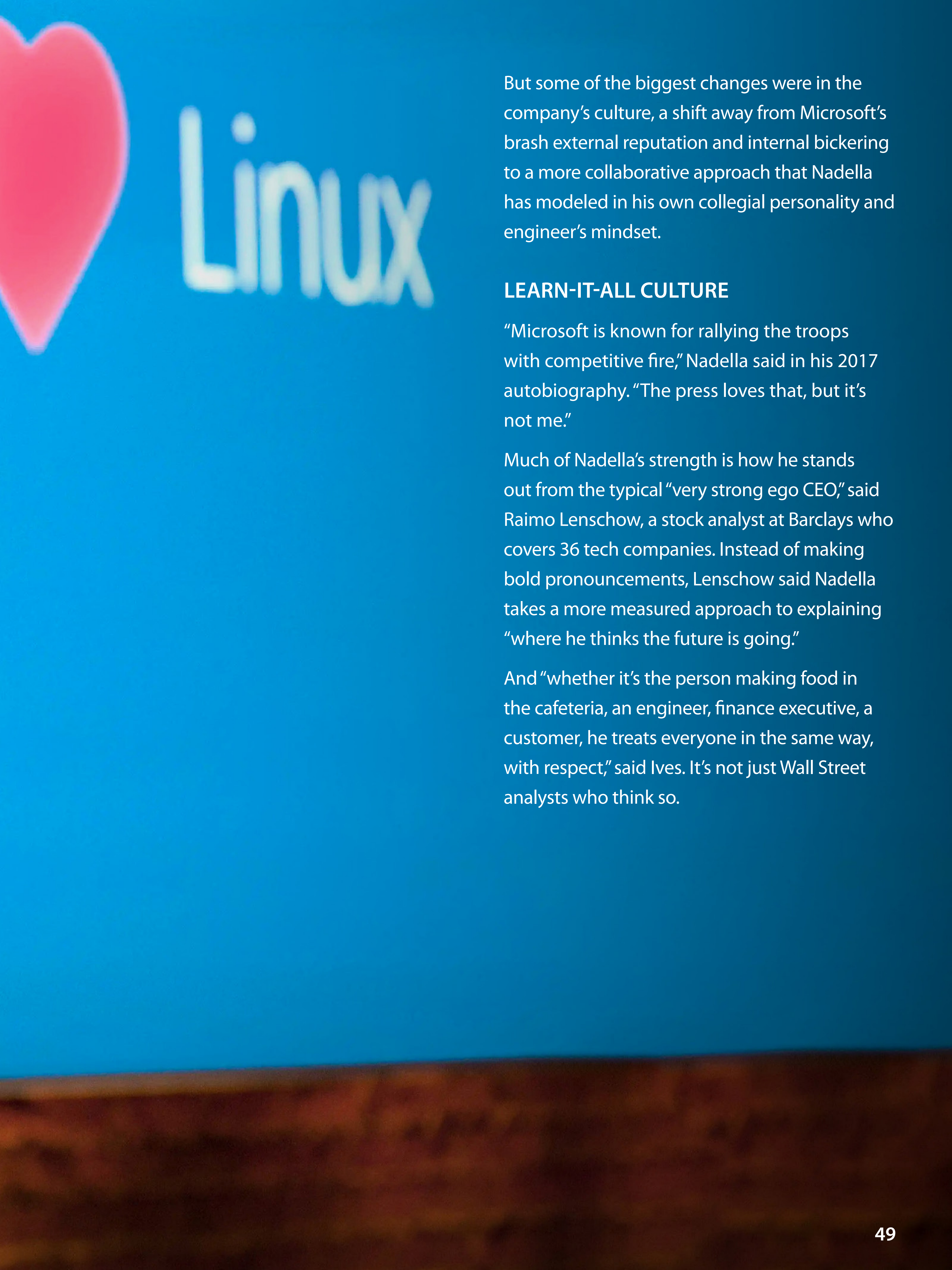
HOW IT HAPPENED

"Our industry does not respect tradition — it only respects innovation," Nadella told employees in an inaugural memo 10 years ago, an opening salvo that hinted at bigger shifts to come. Microsoft declined requests for an interview.

Now a hero to Wall Street, some were at first skeptical that such transformation could come from an insider who'd already spent 22 years at the Redmond, Washington company. He's only the third Microsoft CEO, following Steve Ballmer, who lasted for 14 years, and Bill Gates, who co-founded the company in 1975 and took it public in 1986.

Big changes came quickly under Nadella. He marshaled resources to build up the Azure cloud computing platform, a shift in priorities from the company's longtime reliance on its flagship Windows operating system and the royalties it gets for each PC sold with it. And he largely put the brakes on Microsoft's ill-fated attempts to play catch-up in the smartphone market, marked by his predecessor Ballmer's $7.3 billion acquisition of Nokia's phone business.

Microsoft



But some of the biggest changes were in the company's culture, a shift away from Microsoft's brash external reputation and internal bickering to a more collaborative approach that Nadella has modeled in his own collegial personality and engineer's mindset.

LEARN-IT-ALL CULTURE

"Microsoft is known for rallying the troops with competitive fire," Nadella said in his 2017 autobiography. "The press loves that, but it's not me."

Much of Nadella's strength is how he stands out from the typical "very strong ego CEO," said Raimo Lenschow, a stock analyst at Barclays who covers 36 tech companies. Instead of making bold pronouncements, Lenschow said Nadella takes a more measured approach to explaining "where he thinks the future is going."

And "whether it's the person making food in the cafeteria, an engineer, finance executive, a customer, he treats everyone in the same way, with respect," said Ives. It's not just Wall Street analysts who think so.

A tiny startup from Zeeland, Michigan, running a booth at January's CES gadget show in Las Vegas caught a glimpse of Nadella's curiosity when he showed up, shook founder Tim Murphy's hand and asked for a demo. The product, Audio Radar, visualizes the sounds in video games for deaf and hard of hearing players.

"He's very down to earth," said Murphy, who was there with a small crew including his teen son. "I gave him the pitch, played some games, and he was like, 'It's wonderful what you're doing.' Honestly, I can't really remember too much of what he said because I was just kind of shocked."

Nadella has long made the accessibility of technology a priority, informed in part by his experience raising a son who was visually impaired, quadriplegic and had cerebral palsy. Zain Nadella died in 2022.

AI PUSH

What's brought Microsoft to its latest heights is its emergence as an artificial intelligence leader, setting the agenda on how AI tools could get used in work and society. While Nadella has been emphasizing AI for most of his tenure, its role was not guaranteed and happened after years of careful planning that led to a close partnership with ChatGPT-maker OpenAI.

"Historically, if you're a cool startup that was doing something amazing, Microsoft wasn't really your first choice," Lenschow said. "So the fact that he got OpenAI to commit to Azure was an amazing masterstroke ... it gives him a massive, competitive advantage over Google and Amazon."

That position was put in jeopardy late last year when OpenAI's board of directors suddenly fired CEO Sam Altman. A weekend of behind-the-scenes maneuvers and a threatened mass exodus of employees championed by Nadella helped bring back Altman and stabilize the startup, assuaging clients and shareholders. "He handled that like he was in the World Series of Poker playing against little kids," Ives said.

ONGOING CHALLENGES

Nadella's tenure hasn't been without hiccups, especially given how much of the world relies so heavily on Microsoft products — sometimes to the frustration of people using them.

Cybersecurity experts say its tendency is to sacrifice security for convenience, including in its gung-ho rollout of AI large language models. The company's trademark suite of work tools, Microsoft Office 365, has also been penetrated successfully in recent years in embarrassing high-profile compromises that have seen elite Russian and Chinese cyber operators access the email accounts of senior U.S. officials and members of Microsoft's senior leadership team.

It stepped in to provide cloud hosting to Ukraine just ahead of Russia's 2022 invasion, but the networks serving NATO allies are constantly peppered by intrusion attempts. That, and the worsening ransomware scourge, have led Nadella to call for a cyber Geneva Convention with Russia and China.

And despite Nadella's stated aversion to "competitive fire," Microsoft is once again drawing the kind of antitrust scrutiny that dogged Gates and Ballmer in earlier years.

Image: David Paul Morris

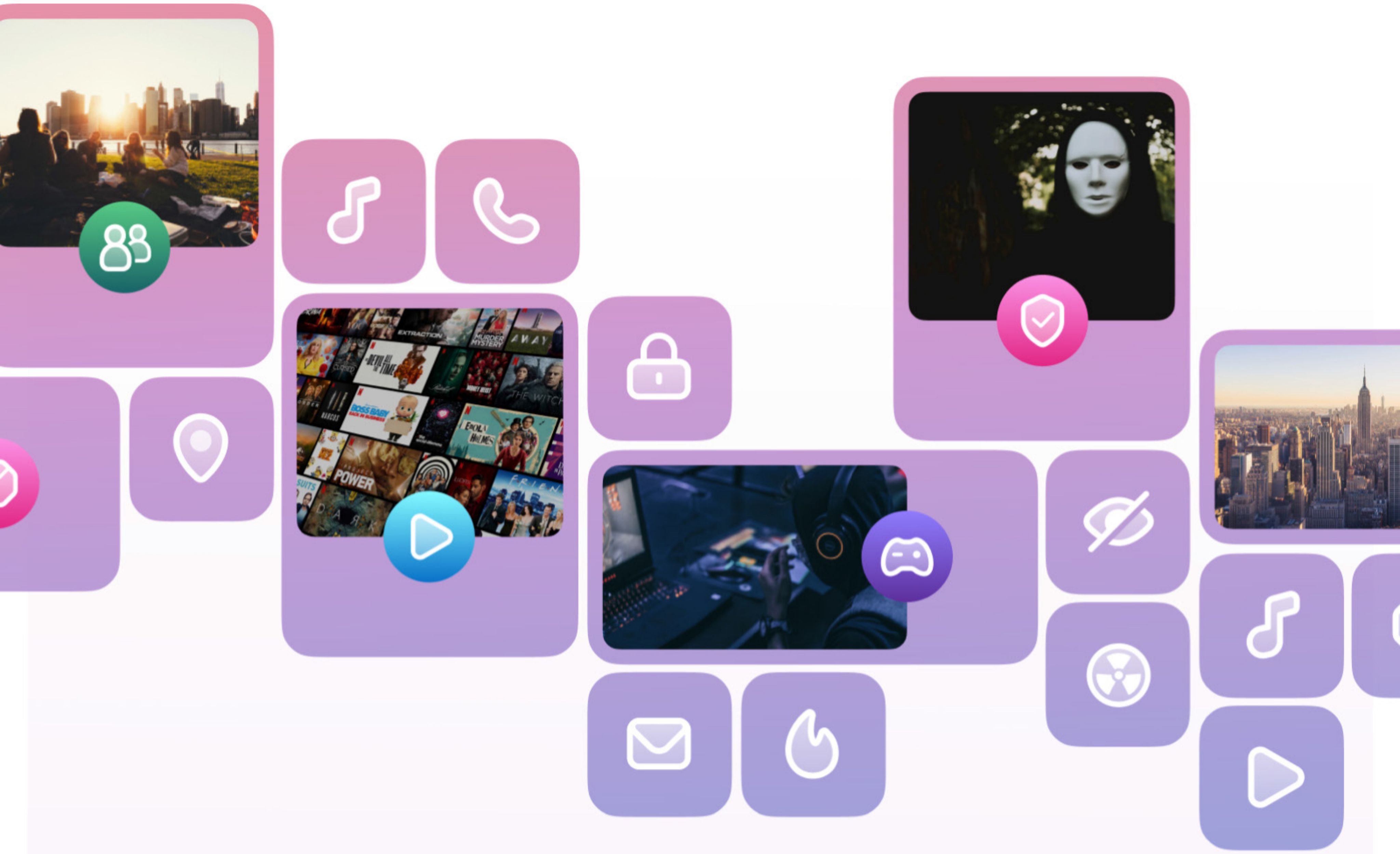
Nadella's confident testimony at a federal court hearing last summer helped persuade a judge not to block Microsoft's purchase of video game giant Activision Blizzard, but the company is now facing another round of questions on its partnership with OpenAI.

None of those challenges are likely to push Nadella, 56, who made $48.5 million in total compensation last year and has also chaired Microsoft's board since 2021, out of his leadership roles anytime soon.

"From everything I can gather, he's really enjoying himself," Lenschow said. "We're in very, very, very interesting times. I would expect him to stay for a while."

Image: Eva Hambach

ClearVPN



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THE JOB MARKET IS HUMMING, BUT LAYOFFS ARE STILL HAPPENING IN A SHIFTING ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

ESTĒE L
GIFT WONDERLAND
GIFT BEAUTIFULLY
驚喜限定套裝
ESTĒE LAUDER

AUDER
ESTĒE LAUDER
GIFT WONDERLAND
BE ESTĒE WANDERLUST
FACE
COLOR
ESTĒE LAUDER
GIFT WONDERLAND
BE ESTĒE WANDERLUST

REI
CO·OP

The U.S. economy is humming and there are hundreds of thousands of jobs being added every month. In a stunning burst of hiring to start the year, the nation added 353,000 jobs in January, shrugging off the highest interest rates in two decades that have been put in place by the U.S. Federal Reserve in part to cool off hiring and spending.

The unemployment rate is hovering at 3.7%, just above a half-century low.

At the same time, layoffs continue to arrive across almost every sector in 2024 as companies adjust to a shifting economy.

Job cuts in tech and retail follow a massive ramp-up in hiring during the COVID-19 pandemic — when people spent more time and money online. Now, many companies are reducing headcounts to help lower costs and bolster their bottom lines. Many still have more workers than they did a few years ago.

Here's where some of the job cuts have taken place in recent weeks.

ESTEE LAUDER

Estee Lauder is cutting 3% to 5% of its global workforce. The downsizing, which will affect as many as 3,100 workers, will be made by July, Estee Lauder said. The company employed 62,000 workers worldwide, according to its latest regulatory filing.

REI

REI is laying off 357 workers, mostly in the outdoor retailer's headquarters and distribution centers. In a letter to employees, CEO Eric Artz noted that "outdoor specialty retail has experienced four quarters of decline — and that trend has been worsening." While REI was able to outperform this for much of last year, he said, this trend caught up to the company in the fourth quarter, and difficult conditions are expected in 2024.

LEVI'S

Levi Strauss & Co. is slashing its global corporate workforce by 10% to 15% in the first half of the year — as part of a two-year restructuring plan that seeks to cut costs and simplify its operations, the denim giant said. The layoffs on the same day Levi's unveiled a proposed 10-year extension to the naming rights for Levi's Stadium, home of the San Francisco 49ers, in a $170 million deal.

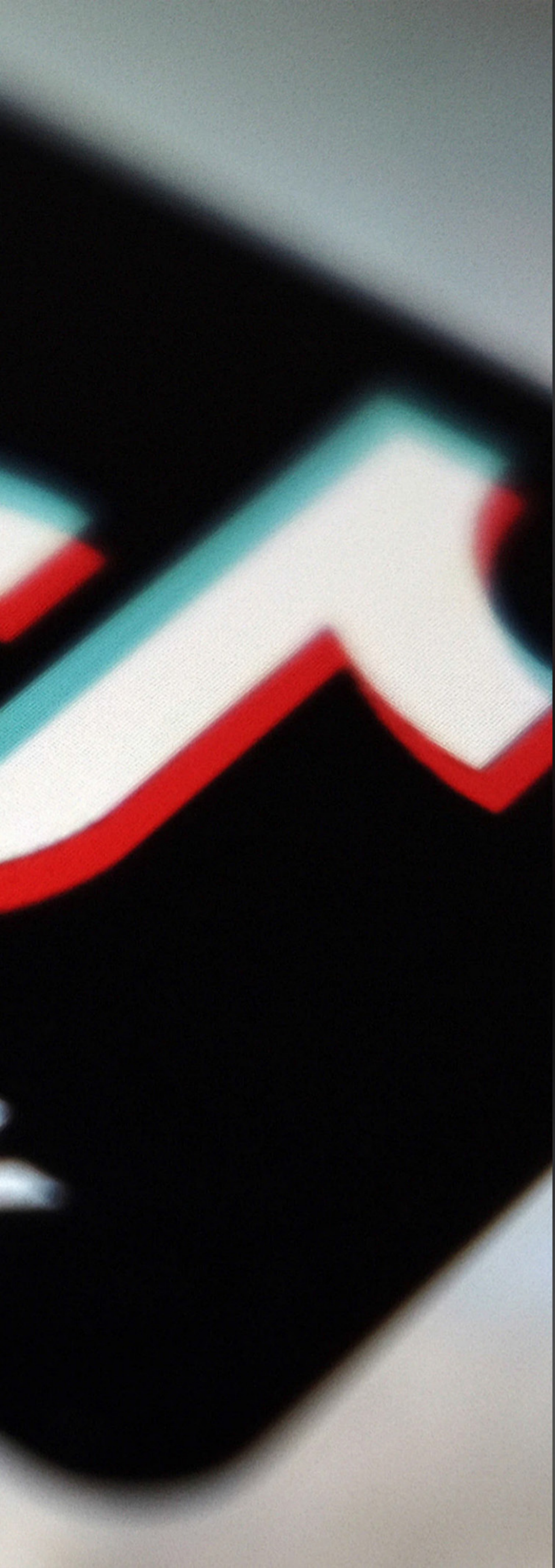
MICROSOFT

Microsoft is laying off some 1,900 employees in its gaming division, according to an internal company memo. The job cuts — which represent about an 8% reduction of Microsoft's 22,000-person gaming workforce — arrive just over three months since the tech giant completed its $69 billion purchase of video game maker Activision Blizzard.

SNAP

The owner of Snapchat is cutting approximately 10% of its worldwide workforce, or about 530 employees, the latest tech company to announce layoffs. Snap Inc. said in a regulatory filing that it currently estimates $55 million to $75 million in charges, mostly for severance and

TikTok



related costs. It expects the majority of the costs to be incurred in the first quarter.

TIKTOK

TikTok said its shedding dozens of workers in its advertising and sales unit. A spokesperson for the company confirmed that the social media platform is cutting 60 jobs. TikTok, which is owned by Beijing-based ByteDance, did not provide a reason for the layoffs.

RIOT GAMES

Video game developer Riot Games, which is behind the popular "League of Legends" multiplayer battle game, is trimming 11% of its staff. The company, which is owned by Chinese technology giant Tencent, said 530 jobs were being eliminated.

EBAY

Online retailer eBay Inc. will cut about 1,000 jobs, or an estimated 9% of its full-time workforce, saying its number of employees and costs have exceeded how much the business is growing in a slowing economy.

WAYFAIR

Online furniture seller Wayfair is cutting about 1,650 jobs, or 13% of its global workforce. The restructuring is set to reduce team sizes across the company and reduce seniority in certain roles with the company planning to "rebuild with modified leveling" this year, CEO and co-founder Niraj Shah said.

MACY’S

Macy’s is laying off about 3.5% of its total headcount, which amounts to roughly 2,350 employees. The iconic department store is also closing five locations in Arlington, Virginia; San Leandro, California; Lihue, Hawaii; Simi Valley, California; and Tallahassee, Florida.

GOOGLE

Google said it was laying off hundreds of employees working on its hardware, voice assistance and engineering teams. The cuts follow pledges by executives of Google and its parent company Alphabet to reduce costs. A year ago, Google said it would lay off 12,000 employees or around 6% of its workforce.

AMAZON

Twitch, which is owned by Amazon, is cutting more than 500 jobs in a bid to save on costs. The video streaming platform’s CEO Dan Clancy said in an email to employees that even with cost cuts and growing efficiency, the platform “is still meaningfully larger than it needs to be given the size of our business.”

Amazon-owned online audiobook and podcast service Audible is laying off about 5% of its workforce. In a memo sent to employees, Audible CEO Bob Carrigan said that the company is in good shape, but faces an “increasingly challenging landscape.” In addition, Amazon’s Prime Video and MGM Studios unit, is trimming hundreds of employees as it cuts back in areas that are not delivering.

itch

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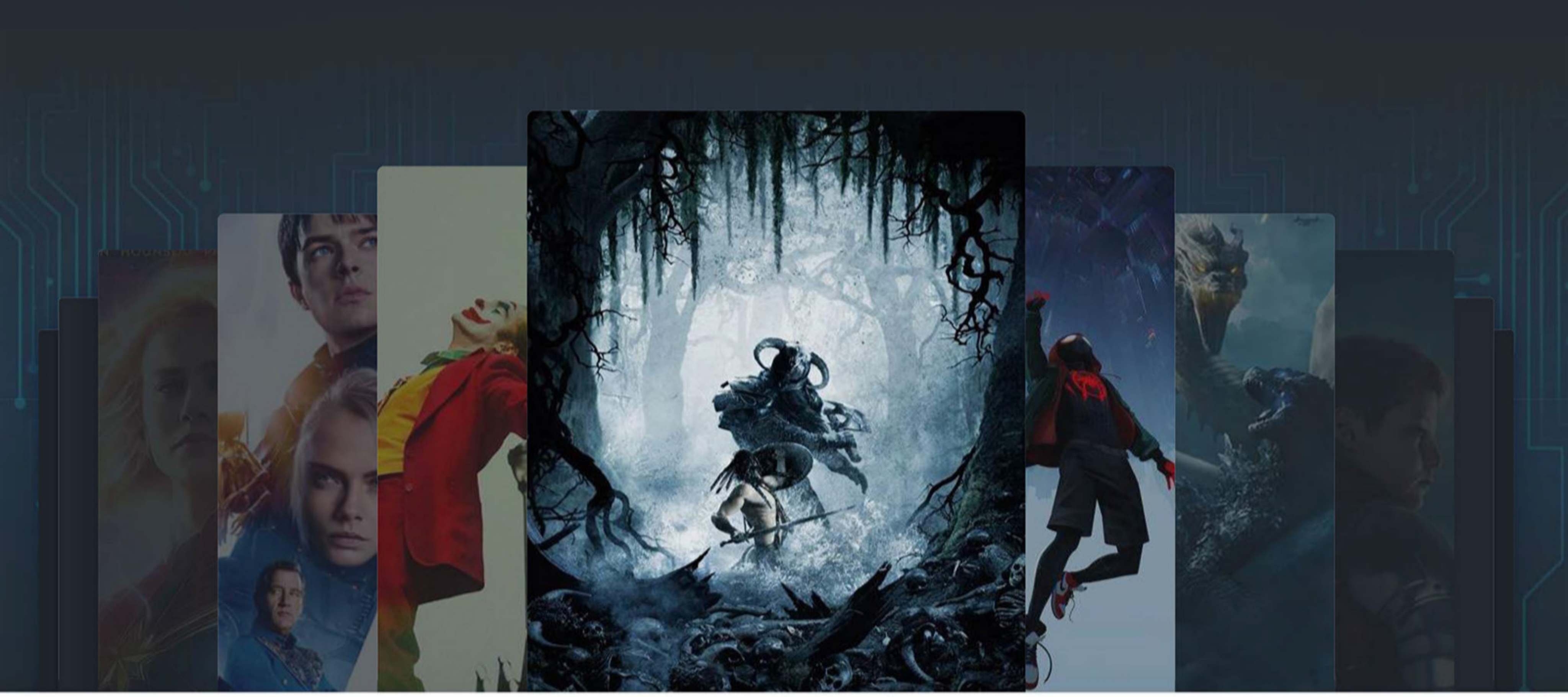

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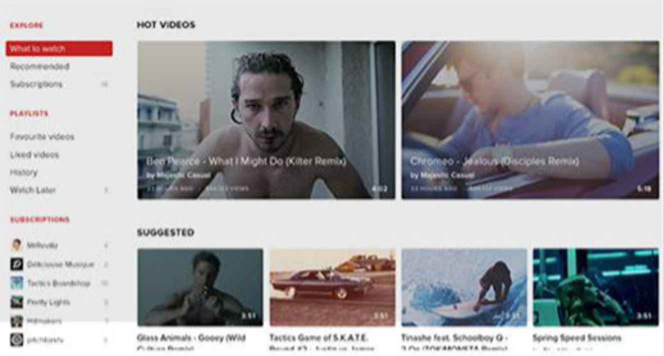

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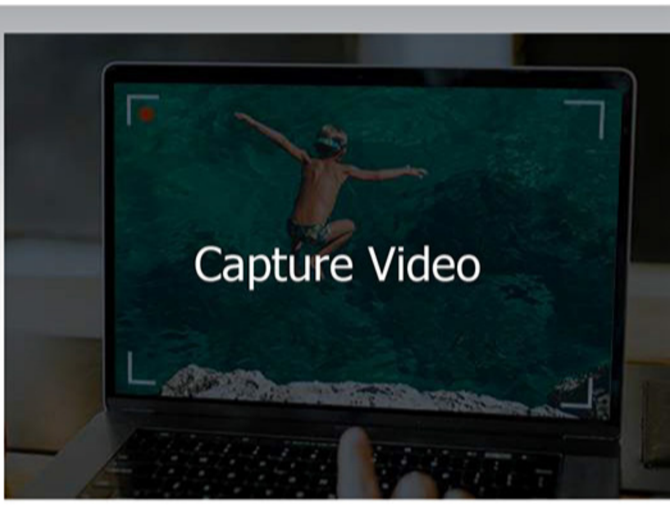

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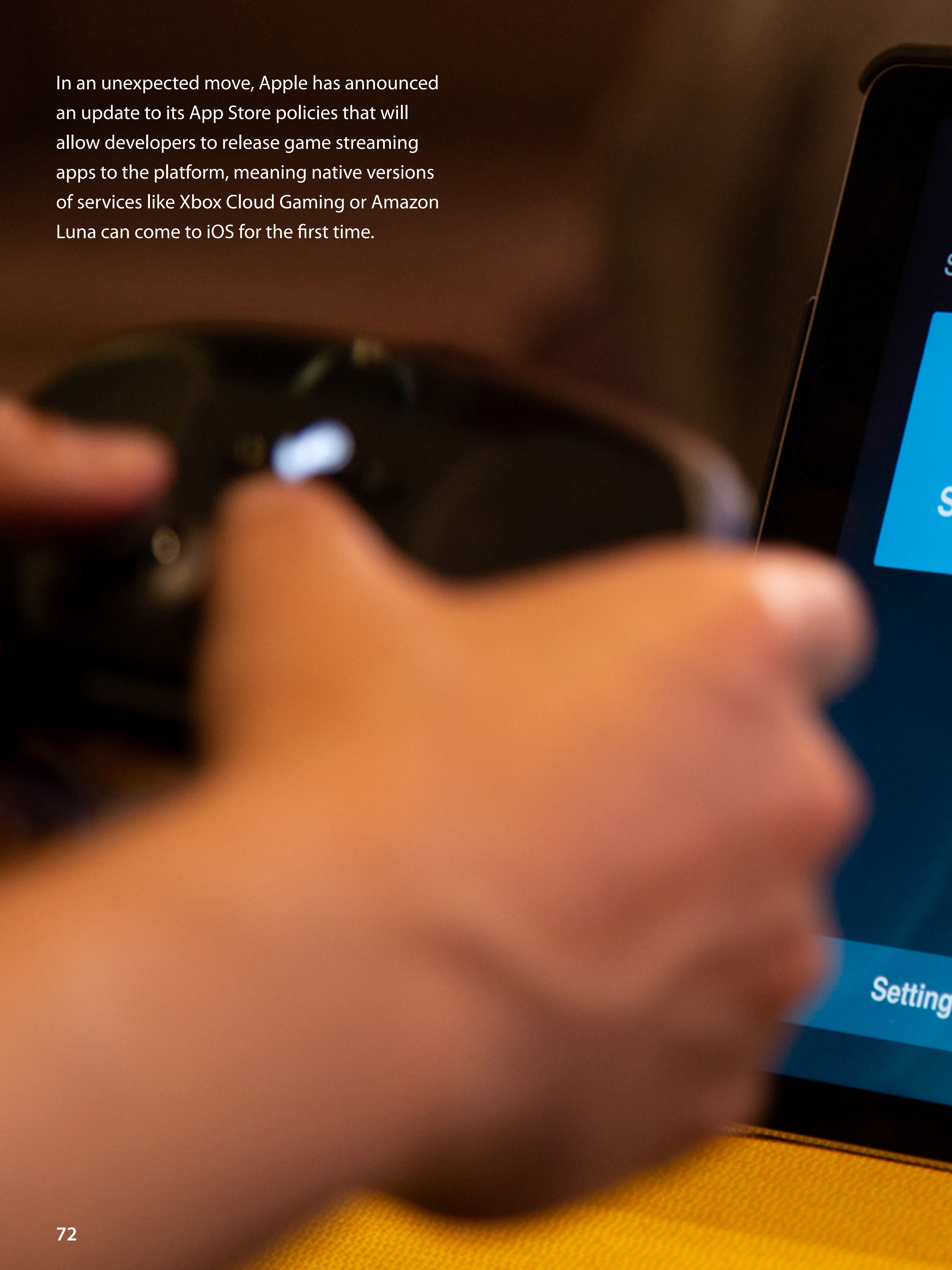
Game Boost

EXPANDING APPLE'S GAMING ECOSYSTEM WITH NEW RULES

In an unexpected move, Apple has announced an update to its App Store policies that will allow developers to release game streaming apps to the platform, meaning native versions of services like Xbox Cloud Gaming or Amazon Luna can come to iOS for the first time.



Steam Link
Stream games from your computer with Steam.
Start Playing
Lawrence-Laptop-Test
Steam Controller
Good Connection
Support

CLOUD GAMING BETA
Jump back in
ori
DESTINY 2
Sea of Th

FORZA
HORIZON 4
NEW SUPER LUCKY'S TALE
GAME
PASS

A NEW ERA FOR GAMING

For years, Apple's stringent policies have meant that developers were forced to submit individual apps for each game they wanted to release on iOS, which many found burdensome and restrictive. This policy effectively barred major game streaming platforms like Xbox Cloud Gaming and Steam from providing full services on the iOS platform and has no doubt stifled innovation on iOS. However, with new guidelines, Apple now allows developers to submit a single 'host' app offering a catalogue of streaming games, mini-games, chatbots, and plugins - good news for gaming lovers.

Interestingly, this policy update is open to more than just the European Union, where regulatory pressure is most intense. Instead, Apple has decided to implement these changes globally, marking a strategic shift in Apple's approach to its App Store, aiming to make it a more attractive and competitive platform worldwide. Apple is introducing new capabilities to enhance the discovery of streaming games to support this new category of game-streaming apps. Additionally, the company is accommodating separate in-app purchases for the first time. This move could

MISSION-8
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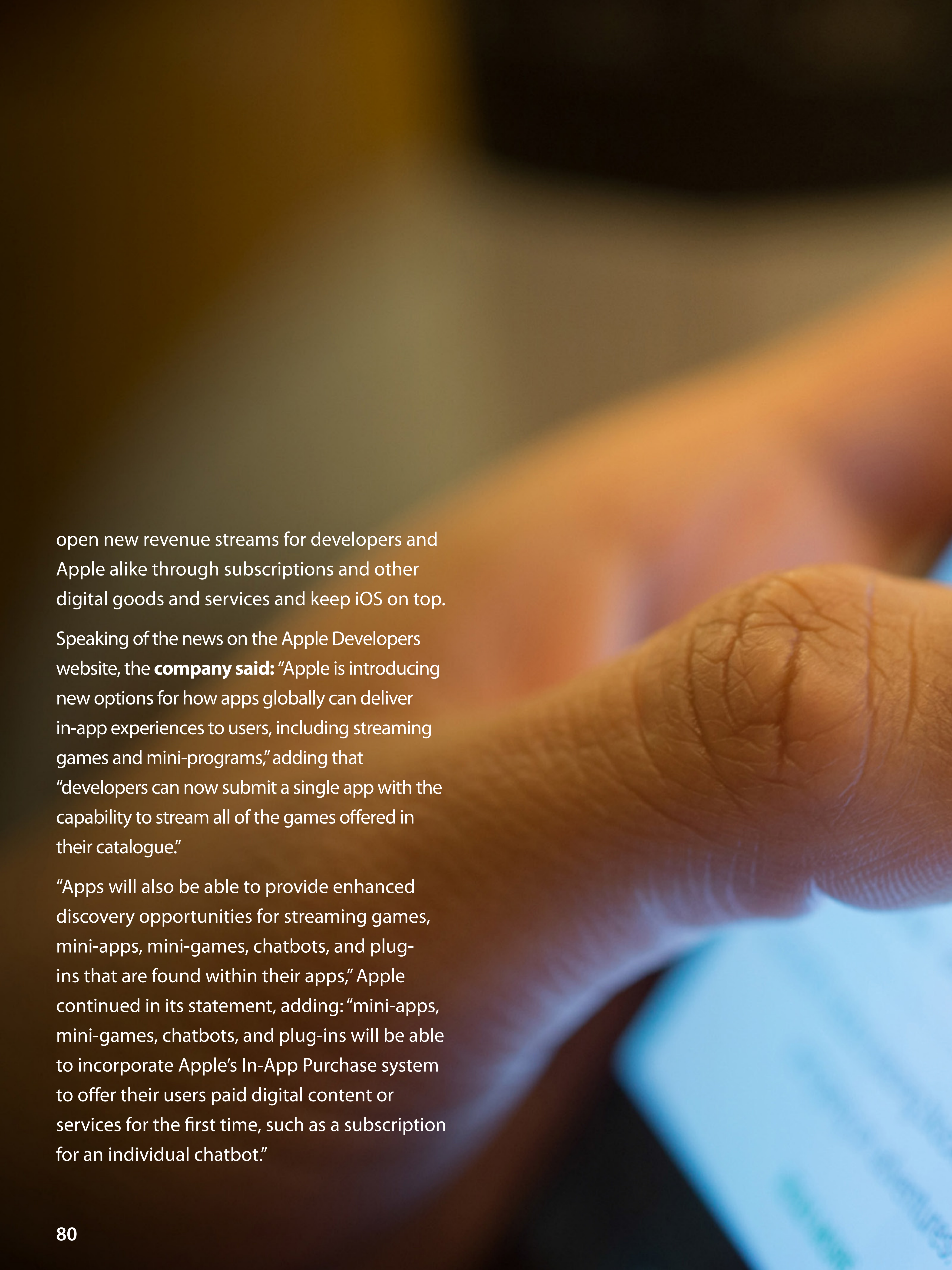
9
MICHELIN



open new revenue streams for developers and Apple alike through subscriptions and other digital goods and services and keep iOS on top.

Speaking of the news on the Apple Developers website, the **company said:** “Apple is introducing new options for how apps globally can deliver in-app experiences to users, including streaming games and mini-programs,” adding that “developers can now submit a single app with the capability to stream all of the games offered in their catalogue.”

“Apps will also be able to provide enhanced discovery opportunities for streaming games, mini-apps, mini-games, chatbots, and plug-ins that are found within their apps,” Apple continued in its statement, adding: “mini-apps, mini-games, chatbots, and plug-ins will be able to incorporate Apple’s In-App Purchase system to offer their users paid digital content or services for the first time, such as a subscription for an individual chatbot.”

MINECRAFT
POCKET EDITION
MOJANG
Pocket Edition
$6.99
In-app purchases
Arcade
Similar

SECURITY CONCERNS

While this is a significant step forward for game streaming services, it raises concerns about privacy and security. Apple’s previous policy of individually reviewing each game provided protection, ensuring that the App Store remained a safe and trusted place for customers. The introduction of streaming game services, where the game code runs off a server, presents new challenges in maintaining this security and trust. The shift to allow App Store streaming platforms opens devices to various risks. These include scams, illegal charges associated with third-party payment systems,

and exposure to unregulated content such as casinos and gambling. This change will require innovative solutions from Apple to safeguard its users against these threats, especially given its reputation for prioritising user privacy.

Another interesting move is that Apple has updated its App Store Review Guideline for using Sign-in with Apple. The service, launched on iOS and available on iPadOS and macOS, makes it easy for users to sign in to apps and websites using their Apple ID and was built from the ground up with privacy and security in mind. From January 2024, **developers no longer need to offer Sign-In with Apple as part of**

Sign in wit

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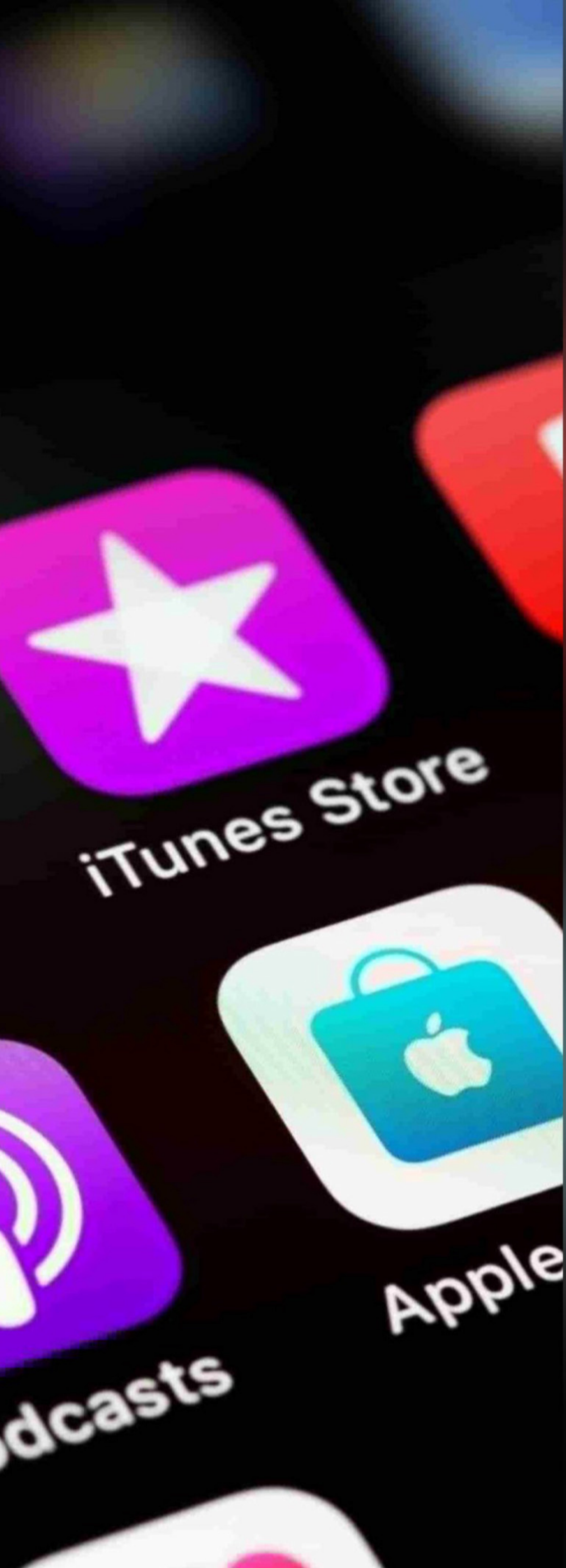
App Store
Po



their app sign-in process. They can instead offer users an equivalent privacy-focused login service instead, provided it meets protocols.

Apple, known for its creativity and innovation, now faces the challenge of adapting its security measures to this new landscape. The company must find ways to ensure its ecosystem remains secure and trusted, even as it becomes more open and diverse.

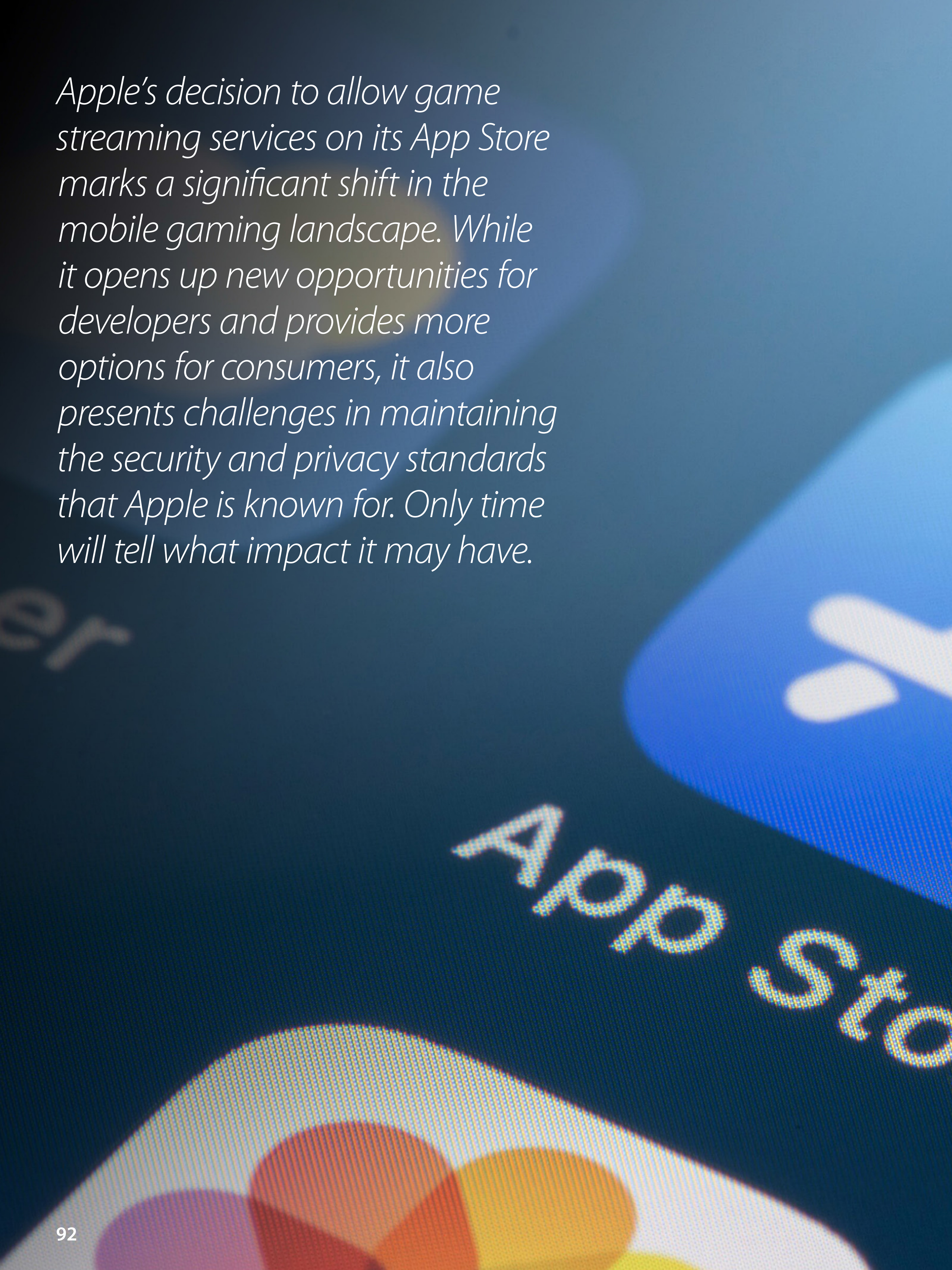
COMPLIANCE

This policy change is not merely a response to developer feedback or a sudden change of heart by Apple. It is closely tied to the broader regulatory environment, particularly in the EU. **The Digital Markets Act** is pushing major tech companies to open up their platforms to other companies' app stores. By relaxing its policies, Apple is likely aiming to keep its App Store competitive and appealing in the face of these new regulations. Other tech giants and game developers are also responding to these regulatory changes. **Companies like Microsoft want to take advantage of the EU's new rules** by **implementing their own app stores.** The move comes after the UK Competition and Markets Authority also said it would move forward with an **investigation into the distribution of cloud game services on mobile devices,** which could provide further regulatory challenges for Apple as it looks to cut costs and keep international markets on side. Introducing sweeping changes could support the company in its efforts to stay compliant around the world and avoid potential fines or even sales bans.

PUSH
SAFE
PUSH

MA40
1 CLICK - 1/2 MOA
RELEASE
LOCK

These developments indicate a significant shift in the mobile app and gaming industry, driven by both competitive forces and regulatory mandates. The truth is that it's too early to say whether this will be good news or bad news for consumers, but it will certainly lead to more choices. Indeed, **we could soon see the Google Play Store on iOS,** and there'll no doubt be a push by large technology firms to encourage users to choose their app stores over the native iOS App Store. Developers and technology companies may even offer incentives to get users on their platforms or limit access to their apps - Meta, for instance, could make its Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp products available exclusively via a Meta App Store for iOS.



Apple's decision to allow game streaming services on its App Store marks a significant shift in the mobile gaming landscape. While it opens up new opportunities for developers and provides more options for consumers, it also presents challenges in maintaining the security and privacy standards that Apple is known for. Only time will tell what impact it may have.

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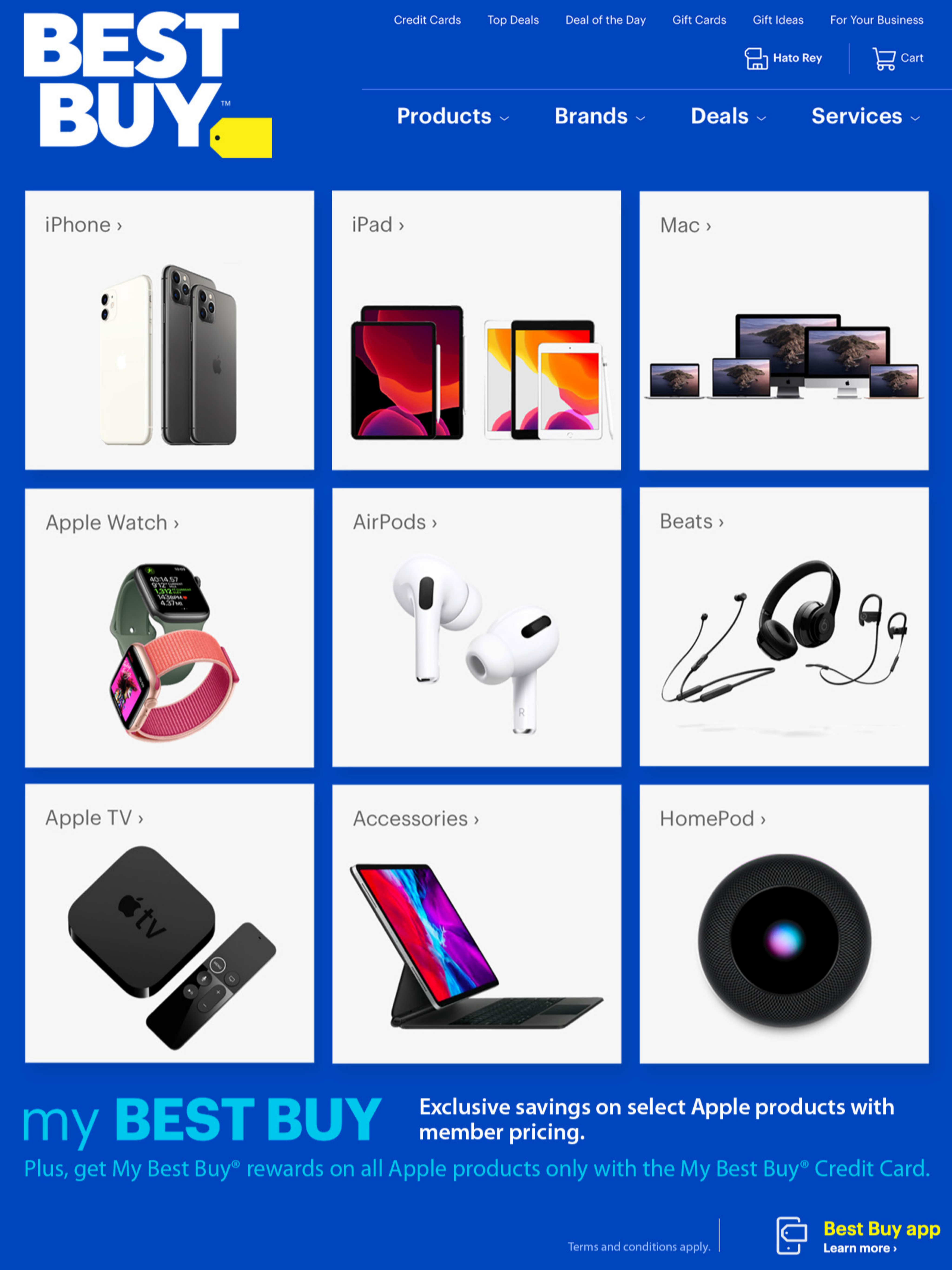

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WHY NOW IS A CRUCIAL TIME TO PAY OFF CREDIT CARD DEBT

For Americans who lacked savings prior to the pandemic, financial stress is rising. A combination of inflation, increased interest rates, and the end of pandemic-tied relief, such as the moratorium on student loan payments, has led to record credit card debt, experts say.

In the fourth quarter of 2023, Americans held $1.13 trillion on their credit cards, and aggregate household debt balances increased by $212 billion, a 1.2% rise, according to the latest data from the New York Federal Reserve.

Delinquencies are also on the rise. As of December, 3.1% of outstanding debt was

CREDIT CARD
3456
MONTH/YEAR
12/99

in some stage of delinquency, up by 0.1 percentage point from the third quarter. The New York Fed's report found that 6.4% of credit card debt was delinquent by 90 days or more, up from 4% in the last quarter of 2022.

"Credit card and auto loan transitions into delinquency are still rising above pre-pandemic levels," said Wilbert van der Klaauw, economic research advisor at the New York Fed. "This signals increased financial stress, especially among younger and lower-income households."

The average interest rate on a given credit card is now roughly 21.5%, the highest it's been since the Federal Reserve started tracking rates in 1994.

Silvio Tavares, president and CEO of VantageScore, one of the country's two major credit scoring systems, said, "the reality is that there are starting to be some significant signs of stress," despite consumers generally being in good financial health.

If you're facing increased credit card debt, while feeling the ongoing effects of inflation, here's what to consider:

ASK FOR A RATE CUT

One of the first things you should do is ask your credit card company to lower your rates.

While the Federal Reserve signaled that its first interest rate cut is likely months away, the average credit card interest rate is already far and away higher than the rate set by the Fed. Most companies offer promotional rates and ways to move your balances to low or zero-interest cards, at least for the first year. These promotions can help keep debt from accumulating.

That said, you may have to pay a balance transfer fee and pay the balance off before a given promotion window ends, or face additional interest.

What's more, reports on bank industry sentiment show banks are becoming increasingly conservative in which loans they give out, which means refinancing may be becoming more difficult.

PAY OFF HIGHER-INTEREST DEBT FIRST

Known as the "avalanche approach," paying off debt that accumulates interest more quickly will always be more efficient than paying off lower-interest debt first. This is the most financially sound method of debt management.

Another way, known as the "snowball approach," considers the psychological rewards of paying off small debts first, which can boost morale, before tackling larger debts. Some financial counselors see this method as more motivating.

Nonprofit credit counseling can be found through the National Foundation for Credit Counseling at nfcc.org.

CONSOLIDATE LOANS AND LOWER YOUR STUDENT LOAN PAYMENT

Wherever possible, counselors also encourage consumers to consolidate loans, at fixed rates when available. The Federal Trade Commission's Consumer Advice guide for Getting Out of Debt can help you make a plan.

When it comes to student loan payments, also make sure all of those debts are consolidated, and that you're taking advantage of every way to lower that monthly cost.

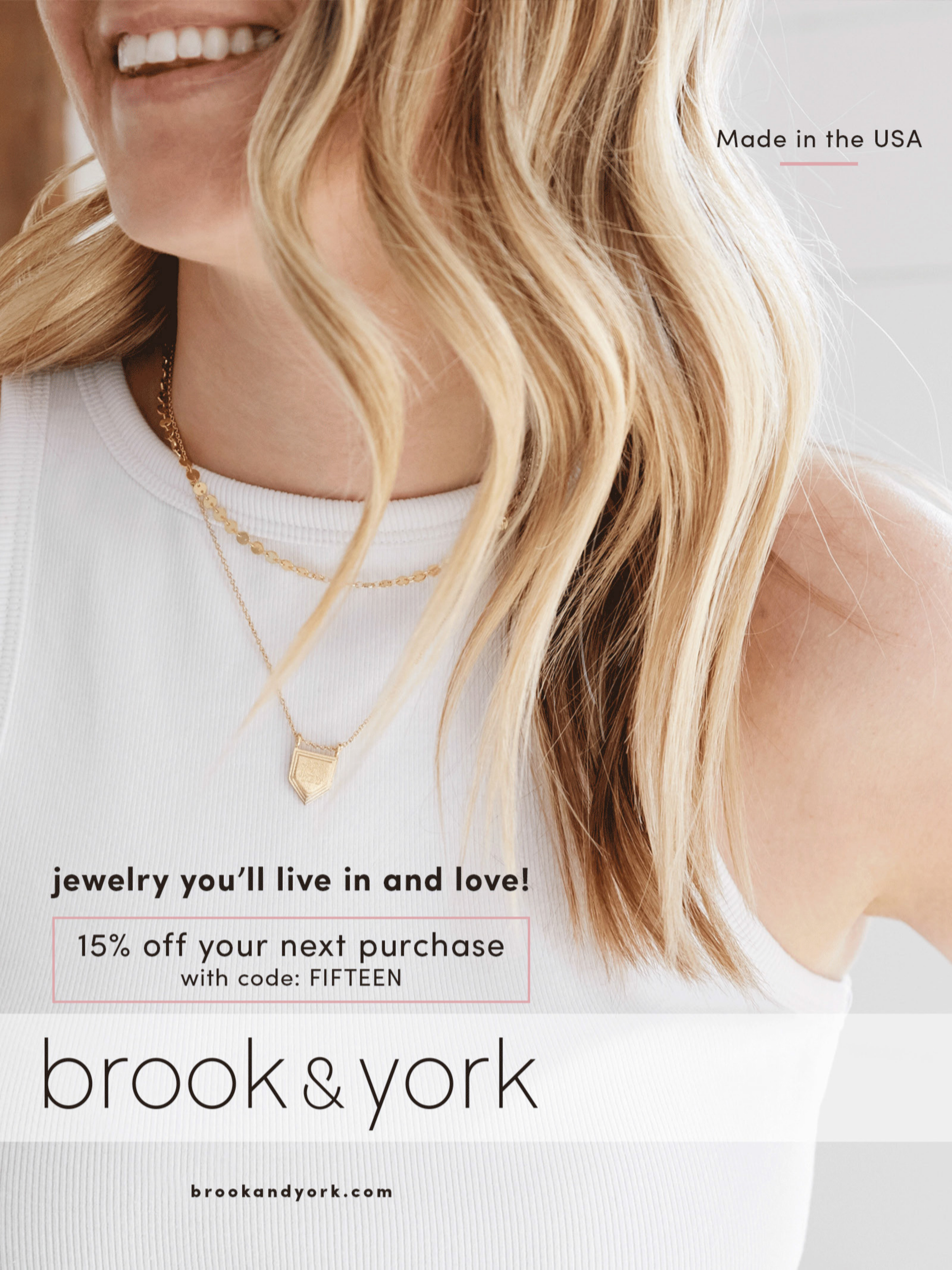
The Public Service Loan Forgiveness program is one of several avenues for relief still available to many with student debt. Other sources for borrowers include: false certification, borrower defense, closed school, total/permanent disability discharges, and alternate repayment programs like income-driven repayment.

BUDGET FOR INFLATION

Inflation is down from its peak, but the cost of many goods and services remains elevated: A loaf of bread that cost $1.54 in December 2020 cost $2.02 at the end of last year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The median rent for a property with up to two bedrooms is up from $1,424 at the end of 2020 to $1,713 at the end of last year, according to realtor.com.

America Saves, a non-profit campaign by the Consumer Federation of America, offers guidance here.

Since the pandemic, some providers of monthly services have become more open to negotiating bills — whether utilities, phone service, cable, internet, or auto insurance. Making these calls can lead to meaningful savings, according to Kia McCallister-Young, director of America Saves. Call to ask for the lowest rate, available rebates and coupons, she advises. If a provider is competitive with other companies, there's an increased chance of getting a discount.



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WHY APPLE IS PUSHING THE TERM ‘SPATIAL COMPUTING’ ALONG WITH ITS NEW VISION PRO HEADSET

With Apple’s hotly anticipated Vision Pro headset hitting store shelves, you’re probably going to start to see more people wearing the futuristic googles that are supposed to usher in the age of “spatial computing.”

It’s an esoteric mode of technology that Apple executives and their marketing gurus are trying to thrust into the mainstream. This while avoiding other more widely used terms such as “augmented reality” and “virtual reality” to describe the transformative powers of a product that’s being touted as potentially monumental as the iPhone that came out in 2007.

Image: Noah Berger

Vision Pro
Enjoy it!
Tosin
Columbia

Image: Noah Berger

“We can’t wait for people to experience the magic,” Apple CEO Tim Cook gushed while discussing the Vision Pro with analysts.

The Vision Pro also will be among Apple’s most expensive products at $3,500 — a price point that has most analysts predicting the company may only sell 1 million or fewer devices during its first year. But Apple only sold about 4 million iPhones during that device’s first year on the market and now sells more than 200 million of them annually, so there is a history of what initially appears to be a niche product turning into something that becomes enmeshed in how people live and work.

If that happens with the Vision Pro, references to spatial computing could become as ingrained in modern-day vernacular as mobile and personal computing — two previous technological revolutions that Apple played an integral role in creating.

So what is spatial computing? It’s a way to describe the intersection between the physical world around us and a virtual world fabricated by technology, while enabling humans and machines to harmoniously manipulate objects and spaces. Accomplishing these tasks often incorporates elements of augmented reality, or AR, and artificial intelligence, or AI — two subsets of technology that are helping to make spatial computing happen, said Cathy Hackl, a long-time industry consultant who is now running a startup working on apps for the Vision Pro.

“This is a pivotal moment,” Hackl said. “Spatial computing will enable devices to understand the world in ways they never have been able

to do before. It is going to change human to computer interaction, and eventually every interface — whether it's a car or a watch — will become spatial computing devices."

In a sign of the excitement surrounding the Vision Pro, more than 600 newly designed apps will be available to use on the headset right away, according to Apple. The range of apps will include a wide selection of television networks, video streaming services (although Netflix and Google's YouTube are notably absent from the list) video games and various educational options. On the work side of things, videoconferencing service Zoom and other companies that provide online meeting tools have built apps for the Vision Pro, too.

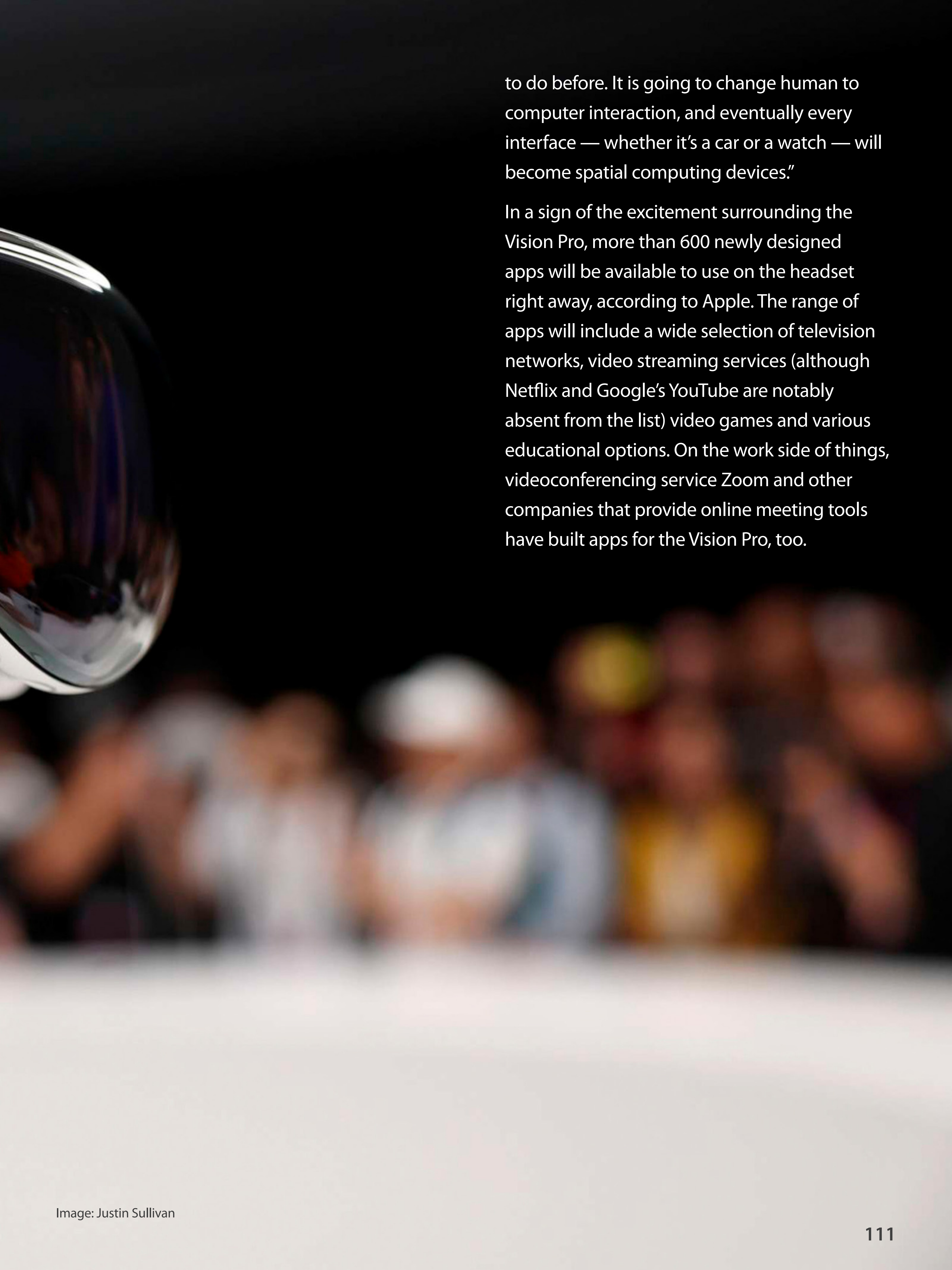

Image: Justin Sullivan

But the Vision Pro could expose yet another disturbing side of technology if its use of spatial computing is so compelling that people start seeing the world differently when they aren't wearing the headset and start to believe life is far more interesting when seen through the goggles. That scenario could worsen the screen addictions that have become endemic since the iPhone's debut and deepen the isolation that digital dependence tends to cultivate.

Apple is far from the only prominent technology company working on spatial computing products. For the past few years, Google has been working on a three-dimensional videoconferencing service called "Project Starline" that draws upon "photorealistic" images and a "magic window" so two people sitting in different cities feel like they are in the same room together. But Starline still hasn't been widely released. Facebook's corporate parent, Meta Platforms, also has for years been selling the Quest headset that could be seen as a platform for spatial computing, although that company so far hasn't positioned the device in that manner.

Vision Pro, in contrast, is being backed by a company with the marketing prowess and customer allegiance that tend to trigger trends.

Although it might be heralded as a breakthrough if Apple realizes its vision with Vision Pro, the concept of spatial computing has been around for at least 20 years. In a 132-page research paper on the subject published in 2003 by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Simon Greenwold made a case for automatically flushing toilets to be a primitive form of spatial computing. Greenwold supported his reasoning

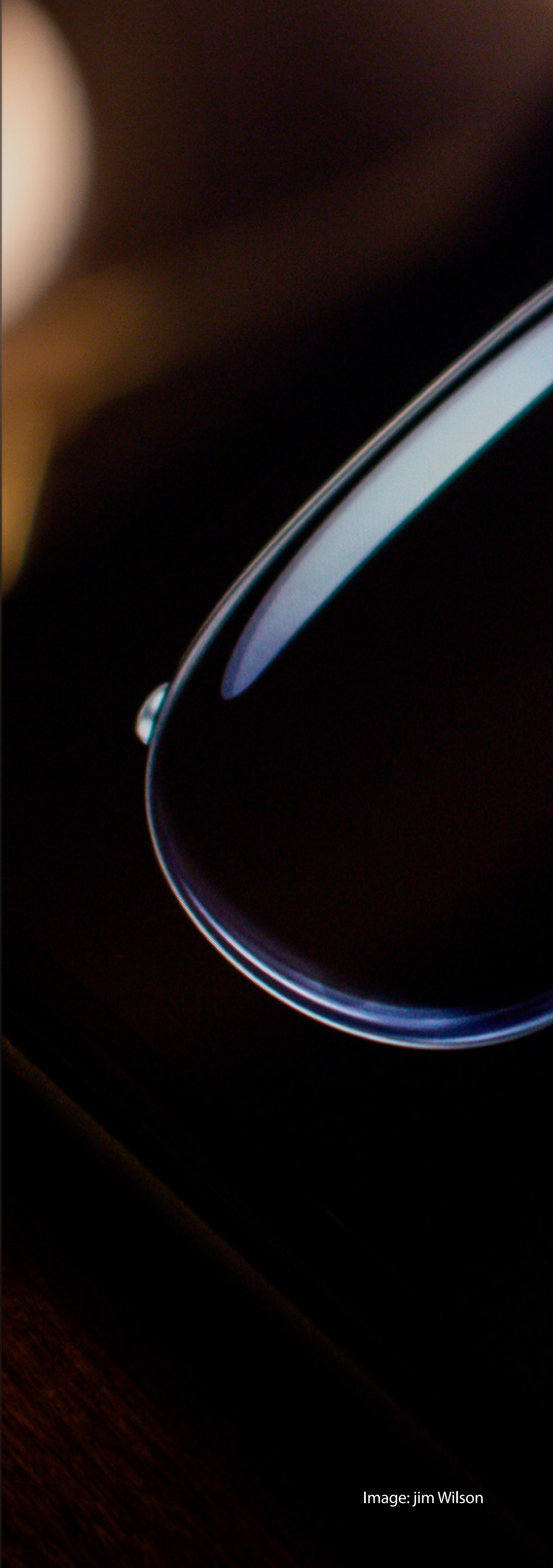

Image: jim Wilson

Introducing
Vision Pro
apple

Image: jim Wilson

by pointing out the toilet "senses the user's movement away to trigger a flush" and "the space of the system's engagement is a real human space."

The Vision Pro, of course, is far more sophisticated than a toilet. One of the most compelling features in the Vision Pro are its high-resolution screens that can play back three-dimensional video recordings of events and people to make it seem like the encounters are happening all over again. Apple already laid the groundwork for selling the Vision Pro by including the ability to record what it calls "spatial video" on the premium iPhone 15 models released in September.

Apple's headset also reacts to a user's hand gestures and eye movements in an attempt to make the device seem like another piece of human physiology. While wearing the headset, users will also be able use just their hands to pull up and arrange an array of virtual computer screens, similar to a scene featuring Tom Cruise in the 2002 film "Minority Report."

Spatial computing "is a technology that's starting to adapt to the user instead of requiring the user adapting to the technology," Hackl said. "It's all supposed to be very natural."

It remains to be seen how natural it may seem if you are sitting down to have dinner with someone else wearing the goggles instead of intermittently gazing at their smartphone.

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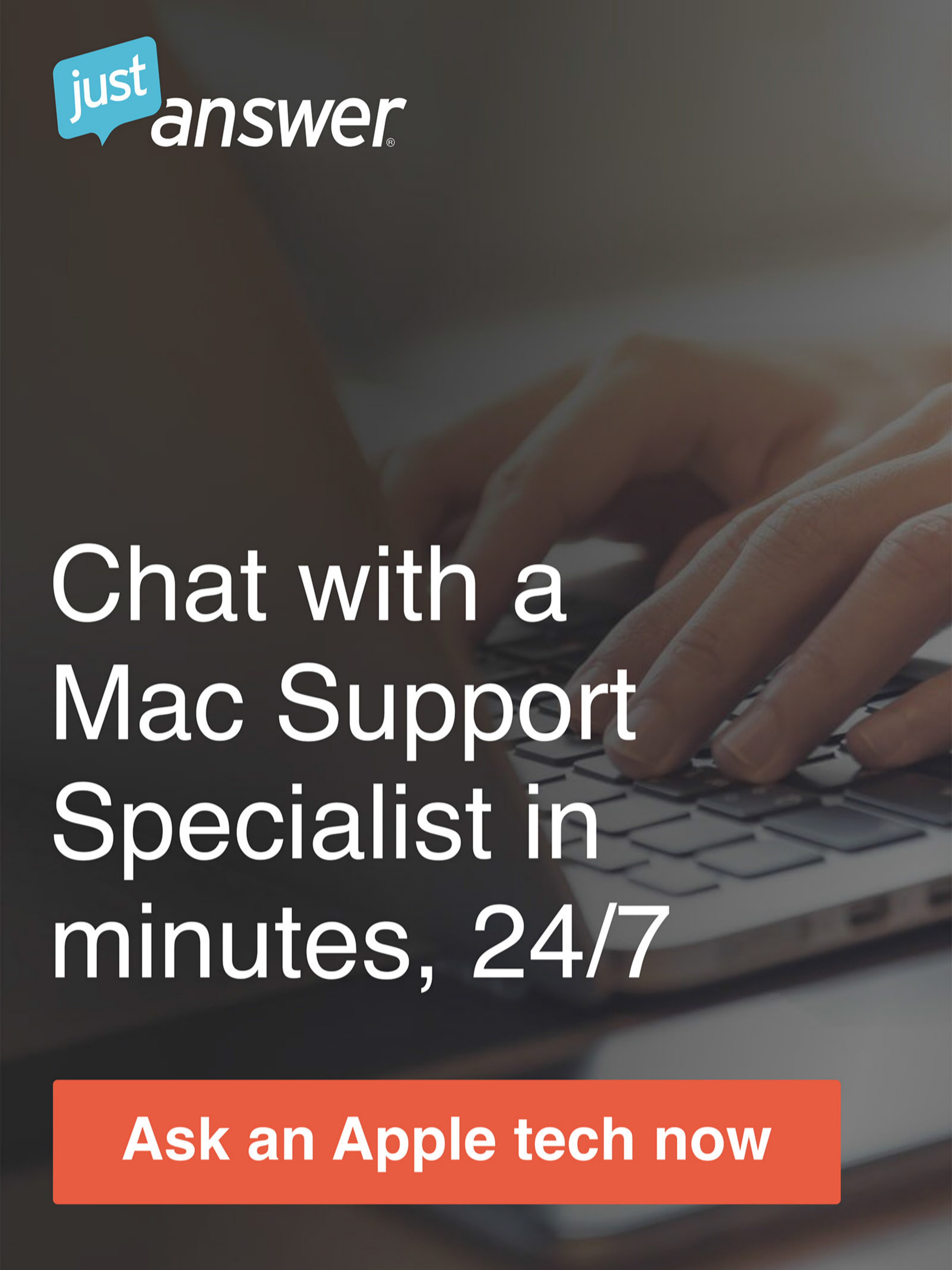

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OVERSIGHT BOARD URGES META TO RETHINK ITS POLICY ON MANIPULATED MEDIA IN HIGH-STAKES ELECTION YEAR

An oversight board is criticizing Facebook owner Meta's policies regarding manipulated media as "incoherent" and insufficient to address the flood of online disinformation that already has begun to target elections across the globe this year.

The quasi-independent board this week said its review of an altered video of President Joe Biden that spread on Facebook exposed gaps in the policy. The board said Meta should expand the policy to focus not only on videos generated with artificial intelligence, but on media regardless of how it was created. That includes fake audio recordings, which already have convincingly impersonated political candidates in the U.S. and elsewhere.

The company also should clarify the harms it is trying to prevent and should label images, videos and audio clips as manipulated instead of removing the posts altogether, the Meta Oversight Board said.

The board's feedback reflects the intense scrutiny that is facing many tech companies for their handling of election falsehoods in a year when voters in more than 50 countries will go to the polls. As both generative artificial intelligence deepfakes and lower-quality "cheap fakes" on social media threaten to mislead voters, the platforms are trying to catch up and respond to false posts while protecting users' rights to free speech.

"As it stands, the policy makes little sense," Oversight Board co-chair Michael McConnell said of Meta's policy in a statement. He said the company should close gaps in the policy while ensuring political speech is "unwaveringly protected."

Meta said it is reviewing the Oversight Board's guidance and will respond publicly to the recommendations within 60 days.

Spokesperson Corey Chambliss said while audio deepfakes aren't mentioned in the company's manipulated media policy, they are eligible to be fact-checked and will be labeled or down-ranked if fact-checkers rate them as false or altered. The company also takes action against any type of content if it violates Facebook's Community Standards, he said.

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Image: Atilgan Ozdil

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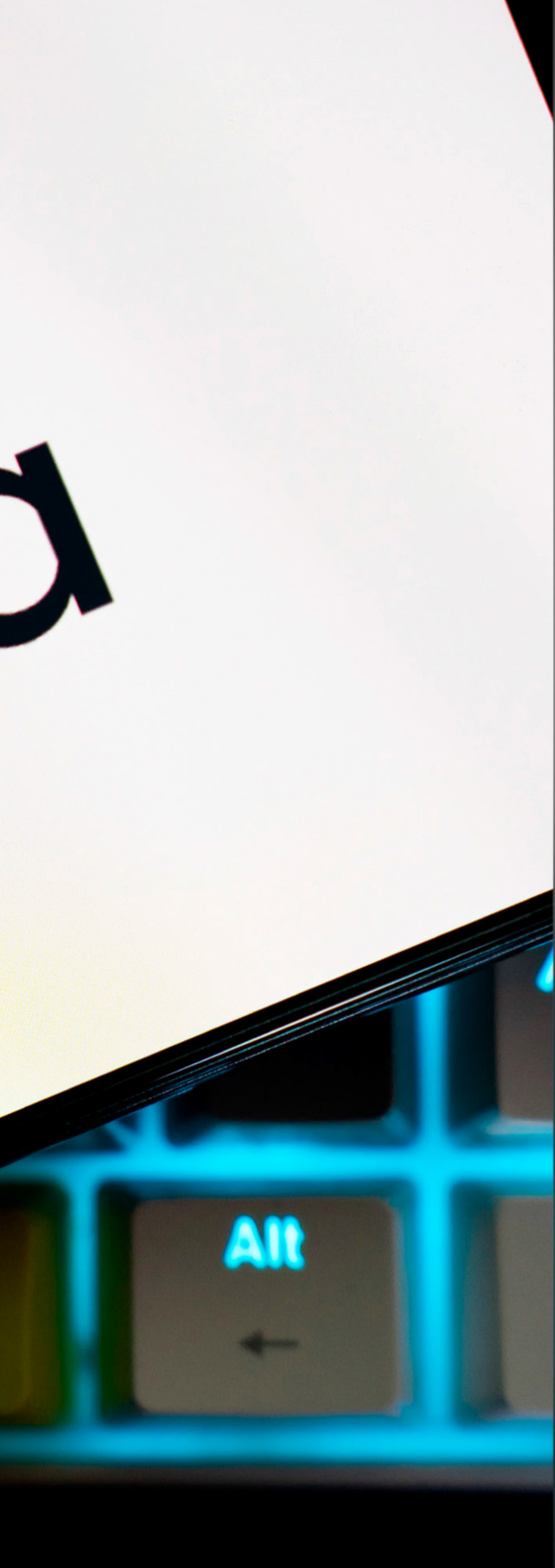

Facebook, which turned 20 this week, remains the most popular social media site for Americans to get their news, according to Pew. But other social media sites, among them Meta's Instagram, WhatsApp and Threads, as well as X, YouTube and TikTok, also are potential hubs where deceptive media can spread and fool voters.

Meta created its oversight board in 2020 to serve as a referee for content on its platforms. Its current recommendations come after it reviewed an altered clip of President Biden and his adult granddaughter that was misleading but didn't violate the company's specific policies.

The original footage showed Biden placing an "I Voted" sticker high on his granddaughter's chest, at her instruction, then kissing her on the cheek. The version that appeared on Facebook was altered to remove the important context, making it seem as if he touched her inappropriately.

The board's ruling on Monday upheld Meta's 2023 decision to leave the seven-second clip up on Facebook, since it didn't violate the company's existing manipulated media policy. Meta's current policy says it will remove videos created using artificial intelligence tools that misrepresent someone's speech.

"Since the video in this post was not altered using AI and it shows President Biden doing something he did not do (not something he didn't say), it does not violate the existing policy," the ruling read.

The board advised the company to update the policy and label similar videos as manipulated in the future. It argued that to protect users' rights to freedom of expression, Meta should label content as manipulated rather than removing it from the platform if it doesn't violate any other policies.

The board also noted that some forms of manipulated media are made for humor, parody or satire and should be protected. Instead of focusing on how a distorted image, video or audio clip was created, the company's policy should focus on the harm manipulated posts can cause, such as disrupting the election process, the ruling said.

Meta said on its website that it welcomes the Oversight Board's ruling on the Biden post and will update the post after reviewing the board's recommendations.

Meta is required to heed the Oversight Board's rulings on specific content decisions, though it's under no obligation to follow the board's broader recommendations. Still, the board has gotten the company to make some changes over the years, including making messages to users who violate its policies more specific to explain to them what they did wrong.

Jen Golbeck, a professor in the University of Maryland's College of Information Studies, said Meta is big enough to be a leader in labeling manipulated content, but follow-through is just as important as changing policy.

"Will they implement those changes and then enforce them in the face of political pressure from the people who want to do bad things? That's the real question," she said. "If they do make those changes and don't enforce them, it kind of further contributes to this destruction of trust that comes with misinformation."

APPLE ENDS YEARLONG SALES SLUMP WITH SLIGHT REVENUE RISE IN HOLIDAY-SEASON PERIOD BUT STOCK SLIPS

Apple snapped out of a yearlong sales funk during its holiday-season quarter, propelled by solid demand for the latest model of its iPhone and still-robust growth in a services division facing legal threats that could undermine its prospects.

The modest revenue growth announced last week as part of Apple's October-December results ended four consecutive quarters of year-over-year sales declines. But the performance still may not be enough to allay recent investor concerns about Apple's ability to rebuild the momentum that established it as the most valuable U.S. publicly traded company.

After years of holding that mantle, Apple recently ceded the top spot to its long-time rival Microsoft, which has been elevated largely through its early leadership in artificial intelligence technology.

Apple is hoping to shift the narrative back in its favor with the release of its Vision Pro headset that transports users into a hybrid of physical and digital environments — a combination the company is promoting as "spatial computing." But the first version of the Vision Pro will cost $3,500 — a lofty price tag analysts expect to constrain demand this year.

"We are optimistic about the future, confident in the long term, and excited as we have ever been," Apple CEO Tim Cook assured analysts during a conference call about the latest quarterly results.

Despite recurring worries that Apple may be entering a period of slower growth compared with its track record over the past 20 years, the Cupertino, California, is still thriving.

Apple's revenue for its most recent quarter rose 2% from the same time in the previous year to

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$119.58 billion. The company earned $33.92 billion, or $2.18 per share, a 13% gain from the same time last year.

As usual, the iPhone accounted for the bulk of Apple's revenue. Sales of the company's marquee product totaled $69.7 billion in the past quarter, a 6% increase from the same time in the prior year. Those results include the latest iPhone that came out in late September, including a premium model that includes a special video recording feature designed for playing back on the Vision Pro.

Apple's services division, which is tied largely to the iPhone, posted an 11% rise in revenue from the previous year to $23.12 billion.

Both the revenue and earnings for the quarter exceeded analysts' projections, according to FactSet Research.

But Apple issued a lukewarm forecast for the current January-March period that indicated iPhone sales will slip from last year, supporting the thesis that the company is mired in a financial malaise.

While it has been consistently generating double-digit revenue growth, Apple's services division is under legal attack. The results of the legal challenges could siphon away a significant chunk of revenue flowing from a search deal with Google and commissions collected through the iPhone app store when consumers complete digital transactions on the device.

Apple's agreement to make Google the default search engine on the iPhone and Safari browser — a deal that brings in an estimated $15 billion to $20 billion annually — is the focal point of antitrust case brought by the U.S. Justice Department that will shift into its final phase

in May. Another antitrust case brought by video game maker Epic Games and new regulatory rules in Europe already have forced Apple to revise its commission system in the iPhone app store, although critics say the concessions are illusory and are pledging to push for even more dramatic changes.

The past quarter also pointed to faltering sales in China, a major market for Apple and an area that investors have been fretting about because of that country's weakening economy and reports that the government there may prohibit its workers from buying iPhones. Apple's revenue in China dropped 13% from the previous year to $20.82 billion.

GM'S TROUBLED ROBOTAXI SERVICE FACES ANOTHER ROUND OF PUBLIC RIDICULE IN REGULATORYHEARING

GM
Marriott

GENEVIEVE SHIROMA
DARCIE L. HOUCK
JOHN REYNOLDS

General Motors' troubled robotaxi service Cruise this week endured a public lashing from a California judge who compared the company to the devious TV character Eddie Haskell for its behavior following a ghastly collision that wrecked its ambitious expansion plans.

The withering comparison to the two-faced Haskell from the 1950s-era TV series, "Leave It To Beaver," was drawn by Administrative Law Judge Robert Mason III during an hour-long hearing held to consider a proposed settlement of a case accusing Cruise trying to conceal its excruciating role in an incident that resulted in the suspension of its California license.

After a vehicle driven by a human struck a San Francisco pedestrian in early October, a Cruise robotaxi named "Panini" dragged the person 20 feet (6 meters) while traveling at roughly seven miles per hour (11 kilometers per hour).

But the California Public Utilities Commission, which in August had granted Cruise a permit to operate an around-the-clock fleet of computer-driven taxis throughout San Francisco, alleged Cruise then covered up what Panini did for more than two weeks, raising the specter of a potential fine of $1.5 million, depending on how the regulations are interpreted.

A new management team that General Motors installed at Cruise following the October incident acknowledged it didn't fully inform regulators what Panini did to the pedestrian that night while also trying to persuade Mason that the company wasn't necessarily being purposefully deceitful.

Mason became so exasperated by Cruise's mixed messaging during Tuesday's hearing that he harked back to the TV series starring Jerry Mathers as the Beaver that still pops up in reruns. "For some reason, Eddie Haskell popped in my head," Mason quipped to Craig Glidden, who now oversees Cruise as its president and chief administrative officer.

Glidden sought to assure Mason that Cruise will accept its culpability for what he described as a regrettable "mistake." Cruise entered the hearing proposed to settle the case for $75,000, but when Mason contended that the company should be required to pay at least $112,500, Glidden immediately agreed to that figure.

"We want to move forward," Glidden said. He also reminded Mason that Cruise could still face other repercussions beyond California, with both the U.S. Justice Department and U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission probing the robotaxi service's conduct.

But Mason indicated that he is leaning toward letting the case continue through the entire hearing process rather than approving a settlement. The judge didn't set a timetable for resolving the matter.

Tuesday's hearing came less than two weeks after Cruise released a lengthy report reviewing how the company mishandled things after the pedestrian was hurt.

The report prepared by the law firm of Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan rebuked Cruise's management that has since been dumped for "poor leadership," and fostering an "us versus them" mentality with regulators. But is also blamed internet connection problems for

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preventing various regulators from seeing parts of a video showing Panini dragging the pedestrian after the vehicle misread the situation.

Besides parting ways with former CEO and co-founder Kyle Vogt and other top executives, Cruise also has laid off about one-fourth of its workforce as part of GM's decision to back off its one-time goal of generating $1 billion in annual revenue from the robotaxi service by 2025.

Me

META SAYS IT WILL LABEL AI-GENERATED IMAGES ON FACEBOOK & INSTAGRAM

Facebook and Instagram users will start seeing labels on AI-generated images that appear on their social media feeds, part of a broader tech industry initiative to sort between what's real and not.

Meta said this week it's working with industry partners on technical standards that will make it easier to identify images and eventually video and audio generated by artificial intelligence tools.

What remains to be seen is how well it will work at a time when it's easier than ever to make and distribute AI-generated imagery that can cause harm — from election misinformation to nonconsensual fake nudes of celebrities.

"It's kind of a signal that they're taking seriously the fact that generation of fake content online is an issue for their platforms," said Gili Vidan, an assistant professor of information science at Cornell University. It could be "quite effective" in flagging a large portion of AI-generated content made with commercial tools, but it won't likely catch everything, she said.

Meta's president of global affairs, Nick Clegg, didn't specify when the labels would appear but said it will be "in the coming months" and in different languages, noting that a "number of important elections are taking place around the world."

"As the difference between human and synthetic content gets blurred, people want to know where the boundary lies," he said in a blog post.

Meta already puts an "Imagined with AI" label on photorealistic images made by its own tool, but most of the AI-generated content flooding its social media services comes from elsewhere.

Meta

A number of tech industry collaborations, including the Adobe-led Content Authenticity Initiative, have been working to set standards. A push for digital watermarking and labeling of AI-generated content was also part of an executive order that U.S. President Joe Biden signed in October.

Clegg said that Meta will be working to label “images from Google, OpenAI, Microsoft, Adobe, Midjourney, and Shutterstock as they implement their plans for adding metadata to images created by their tools.”

Google said last year that AI labels are coming to YouTube and its other platforms.

“In the coming months, we’ll introduce labels that inform viewers when the realistic content they’re seeing is synthetic,” YouTube CEO Neal Mohan reiterated in a year-ahead blog post.

One potential concern for consumers is if tech platforms get more effective at identifying AI-generated content from a set of major commercial providers but miss what’s made with other tools, creating a false sense of security.

“There’s a lot that would hinge on how this is communicated by platforms to users,” said Cornell’s Vidan. “What does this mark mean? With how much confidence should I take it? What is its absence supposed to tell me?”

ESPN, FOX, WARNER BROS. DISCOVERY ARE PLANNING A SPORTS STREAMING PLATFORM IN THE FALL

ESPN, Fox and Warner Bros. Discovery announced plans this week to launch a sports streaming platform in the fall that will include offerings from at least 15 networks and all four major professional sports leagues.

A one-stop app to view most sports should be a welcome sight for fans, who continue to navigate rising costs by subscribing to multiple services.

Kevin Krim, the president and CEO of the ad measurement firm EDO, compared the three companies teaming up for sports like what some networks did when Hulu started in 2008.

“My sense is knowing the cast of characters, they’re looking at the original Hulu concept and thinking, ‘Well, that worked out really well for us.’ So let’s do that again. But for live sports streaming,” he said.

The three companies will each share one-third ownership in the joint venture. A name for the service and pricing will be announced at a later date.

“This new sports service exemplifies our ability as an industry to drive innovation and provide consumers with more choice, enjoyment and value and we’re thrilled to deliver it to sports fans,” Warner Bros. Discovery CEO David Zaslav said in a statement.

The platform will include games from the NFL, NBA, MLB, NHL, WNBA, NASCAR and college sports, including the men’s and women’s NCAA Tournament, as well as golf, tennis and the FIFA World Cup.

It will include offerings from 15 linear networks — ESPN, ESPN2, ESPNU, SEC Network, ACC

Network, ESPNEWS, ABC, FOX, FS1, FS2, Big Ten Network, TNT, TBS, truTV — and ESPN+.

Subscribers would also have the ability to bundle the product with Disney+, Hulu and/or Max.

"We believe the service will provide passionate fans outside of the traditional bundle an array of amazing sports content all in one place," Fox CEO and Executive Chair Lachlan Murdoch said in a statement.

The announcement of the bundle also comes as ESPN and Warner Bros. Discovery are preparing to enter negotiations to renew their NBA rights, which expire at the end of next season.

"To me, the thing that's triggering all this is the NBA. We see time and again that the NBA is the second-best franchise on TV behind the NFL," Krim said. "You're sort of staring at that renegotiation and new bids coming in that could include Google, Amazon, Netflix, Apple and others. It's a good way to team up and stay competitive."

ESPN has also been searching for strategic partners as it prepares to launch a direct-to-consumer product in the next year or two.

"The launch of this new streaming sports service is a significant moment for Disney and ESPN, a major win for sports fans, and an important step forward for the media business," Walt Disney Company CEO Bob Iger said in a statement. "This means the full suite of ESPN channels will be available to consumers alongside the sports programming of other industry leaders as part of a differentiated sports-centric service."

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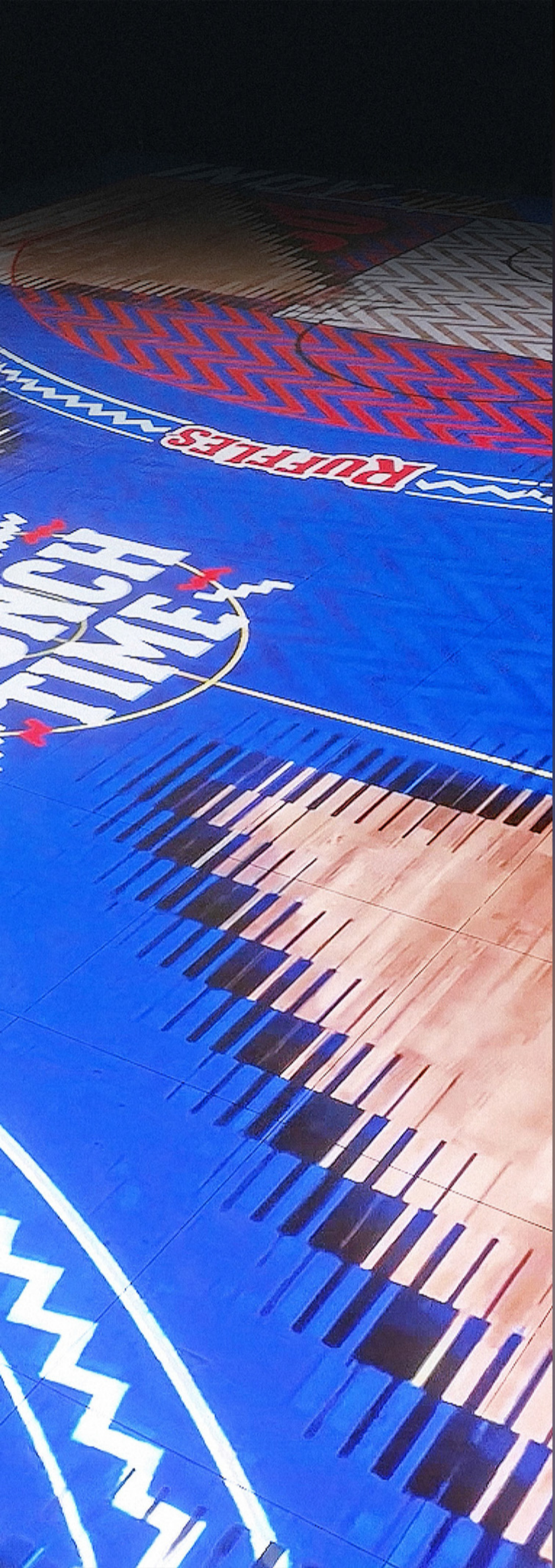

For the first time, the NBA will play on glass.

Part of All-Star weekend in Indianapolis — including the entire All-Star Saturday Night lineup — will be played on a state-of-the-art, full video LED court that will be installed at Lucas Oil Stadium, the league said this week.

That means the skills competition, the 3-point contest, the slam dunk competition and the shooting matchup between Stephen Curry and Sabrina Ionescu will take place on the glass floor on Feb. 17, as will the celebrity game on Feb. 16. The actual All-Star Game itself on Feb. 18 will remain on a wooden court.

"It gives us a little bit more range in what we can do as far as interactive graphics, reactionary graphics that happen on the floor, changing the floor design, changing the colors, really reacting to the play that happens on the court," said Carlton Myers, an NBA senior vice president overseeing live production and entertainment. "So, we feel really, really good about the capabilities of what this gives us, what this provides us. And we think it's going to be really impactful, both in the building and watching on television."

The court, developed by the German company ASB GlassFloor, has been used in events by FIBA, the sport's governing body. FIBA approved usage of LED glass flooring at top-tier competitions in 2022. The league didn't reveal what the court costs, other than it's more expensive than a wood surface.

The NBA has been considering ways to use the product for some time. Andre Iguodala of the National Basketball Players Association and Joe Dumars, the NBA's executive vice president for basketball operations, experimented on the court last week to check how it plays and whether it's safe.

The court itself is actually two layers of laminated safety glass, each five millimeters thick, the NBA said. The surface is opaque, and all the designs will be provided by the LED panels. Courts will have a different look for each event — and part of what'll be displayed are real-time game stats, replays, video content and even player tracking animations.

The surface plays almost exactly the same way wood does, in terms of bounce and feel.

"What does it feel like? Does it have traction? Does it have give? Those were the questions that came to mind right away when you hear about this court," Dumars said. "And they were answered to our satisfaction."

The NBA experimented with court design changes earlier this season, when it used different-looking surfaces for the In-Season Tournament. Those courts were still the traditional wood, just with a different paint scheme.

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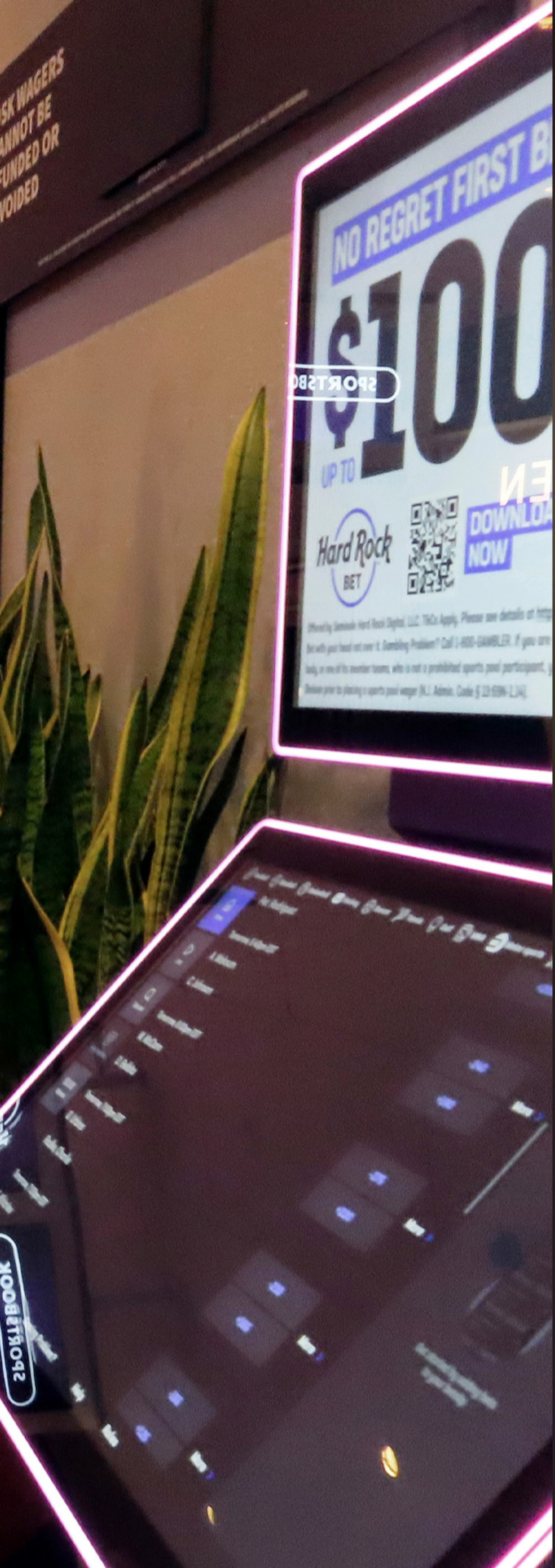
THE SUPER BOWL IS EXPECTED TO SMASH BETTING RECORDS. NEARLY 68M US ADULTS PLAN TO WAGER



Nearly 68 million American adults — about 1 in 4 — plan to bet on this year's Super Bowl, setting a record by a wide margin, according to the gambling industry's national trade association.

Figures released this week by the American Gaming Association include bets placed with legal outlets, as well as with illegal bookies and online operations in other countries.

The volume of betting participation is projected to be 35% higher than last year, which was the previous record.

Bettors plan to wager an estimated $23.1 billion on this year's Super Bowl, up from $16 billion last year, the group predicted.

Of that, about $1.5 billion is projected to be bet with legal outlets, the group said, citing consensus estimates from various sources. That is in the same ballpark as the $1.25 billion in legal bets projected by Irvine, California-based research firm Eilers & Krejcik Gaming.

Sports betting is legal in 38 states plus Washington, D.C.

"There's a good chance that every Super Bowl for the next ten or so years will be the most bet Super Bowl thanks to the underlying growth of regulated sports betting in the U.S.," said gambling analyst Chris Grove, a partner at Eilers & Krejcik Gaming.

Sunday's game will feature the defending Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs against the San Francisco 49ers in a rare rematch from four years ago.

The 49ers are favored by 2.5 points, meaning they would have to win the game by 3 or more points for bets on them to be winners. Conversely, if the Chiefs win, or if they lose by no more than 2 points, bets on Kansas City would win. Those odds are from FanDuel Sportsbook provider.

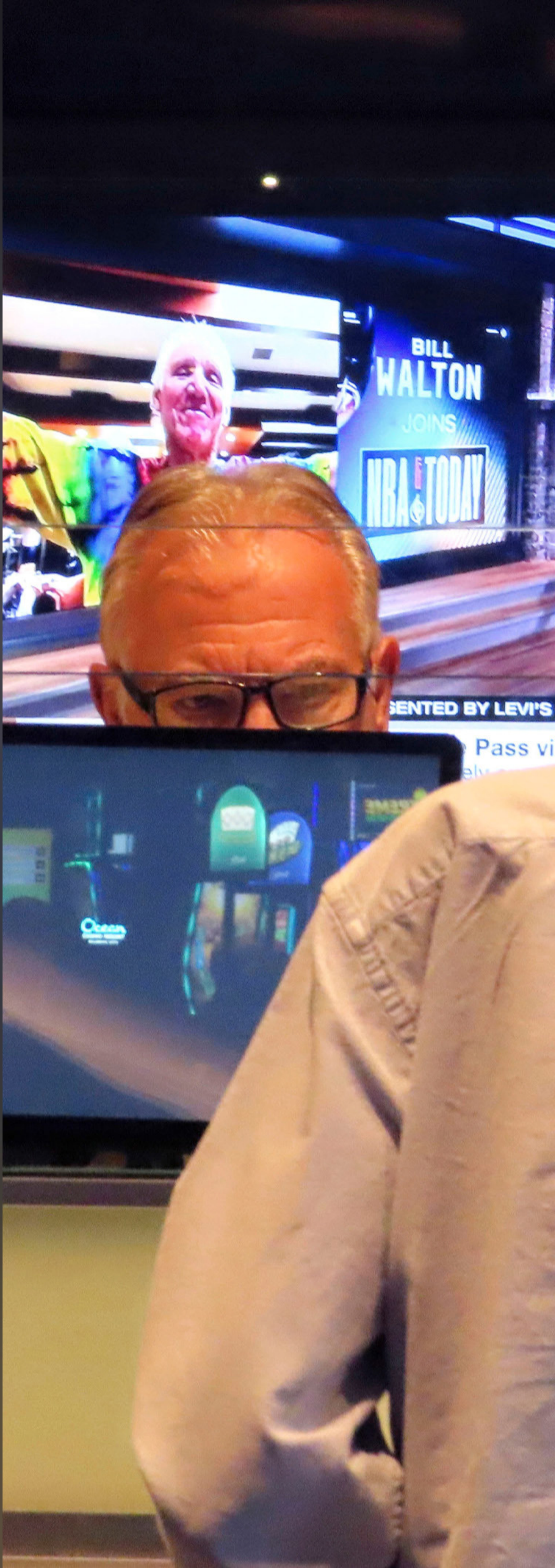
The romance between Chiefs star tight end Travis Kelce and pop superstar Taylor Swift might be helping drive interest in this Super Bowl. About 73% of adults say they plan to watch the game this year, about 10% higher than in recent previous years.

"I think the 'Taylor Swift effect' will be more obviously felt in terms of the total number of people watching and betting on the game than it will be in the total dollars bet on the game," Grove said. "But there's little doubt that sportsbooks will be seeing Swifties sign up that otherwise would not have given sports betting a second thought."

Likewise, Cait DeBaun, a vice president with the American Gaming Association, said Swift could be one of several reasons for increased betting on this year's Super Bowl, along with "the compelling matchup," the game being held in Las Vegas, the nation's betting capital, and the growing availability of legal sports betting in the U.S.

The largest group in the survey — 42.7 million adults — plans to place a wager online (legally or illegally), at a retail sportsbook or with an illegal bookie, an increase of 41% from last year.

About 36.5 million adults plan to bet casually with friends, or as part of a pool or squares contest, up 32% from last year.



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Bettors are nearly split on the outcome of the game, with 47% planning to bet on the Kansas City Chiefs and 44% planning to bet on the San Francisco 49ers, according to the association's survey conducted Jan. 30 through Feb. 1 of a national sample of 2,204 adults. The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

Groups that treat or seek to prevent compulsive gambling are always concerned as the Super Bowl approaches, let alone one with the anticipated betting activity this year's game is likely to have. The Council on Compulsive Gambling of NJ urges bettors to set limits on their wagering, only bet what you can afford to lose and never chase gambling losses with additional bets.

That is particularly important with the widespread availability of in-game bets, the group said.

"The capacity to wager throughout the game allows gamblers to take as many risks as there are plays, and with every setback comes the temptation to try to recoup one's losses with yet another bet," it said in a statement.

Help for those with a gambling problem is available by calling 800-GAMBLER.

Eilers & Krejcik forecasts that nearly 13% of money bet with legal sportsbooks will come from Nevada, where the game will be played. That is followed by New York (12.4%), New Jersey (9.6%); Pennsylvania (7.4%), Illinois (7.3%); Ohio (7%) and Arizona (5.6%). Other states are projected to account for 3.6% or less individually.

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To Win
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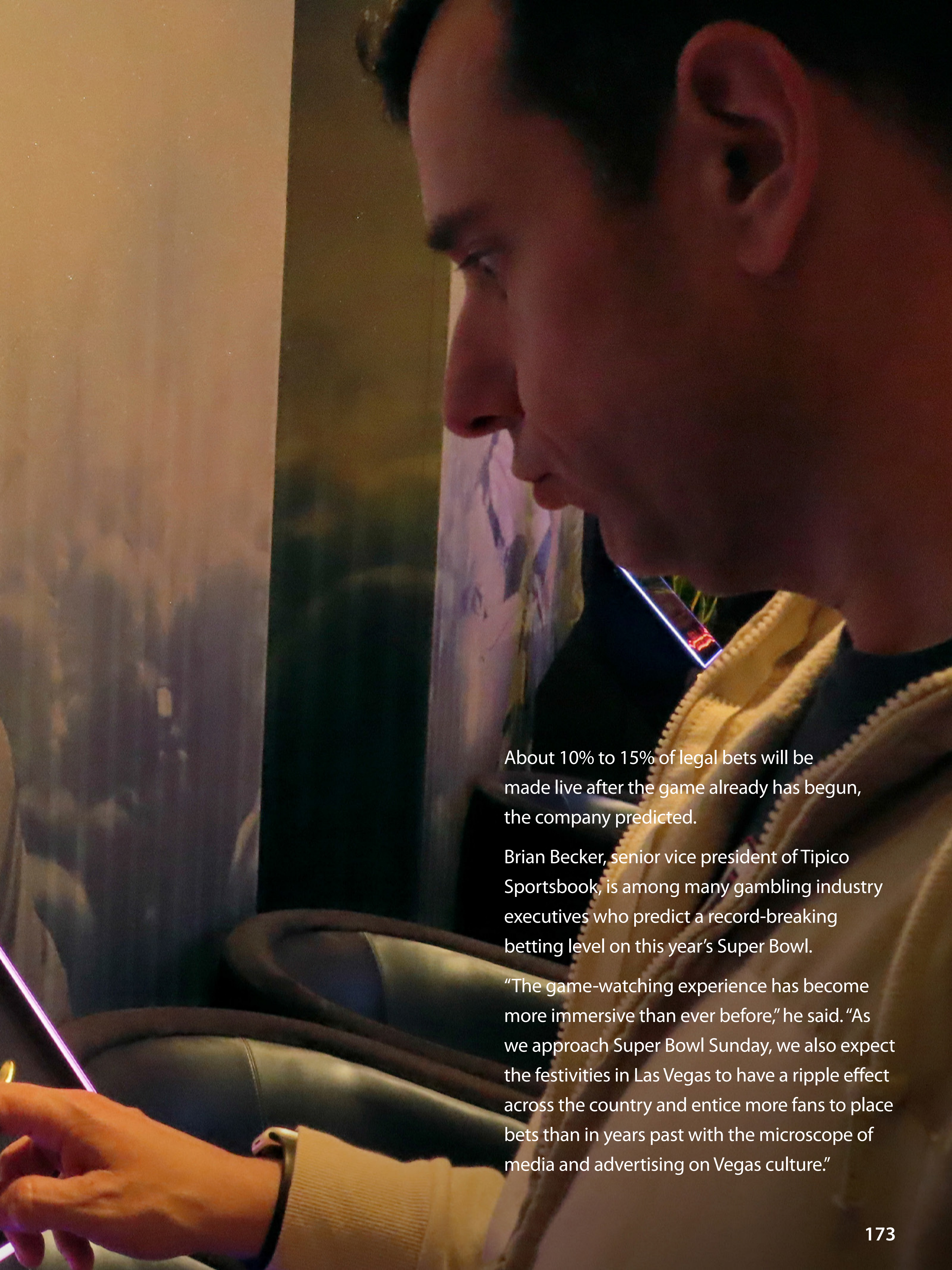
Rules



About 10% to 15% of legal bets will be made live after the game already has begun, the company predicted.

Brian Becker, senior vice president of Tipico Sportsbook, is among many gambling industry executives who predict a record-breaking betting level on this year's Super Bowl.

"The game-watching experience has become more immersive than ever before," he said. "As we approach Super Bowl Sunday, we also expect the festivities in Las Vegas to have a ripple effect across the country and entice more fans to place bets than in years past with the microscope of media and advertising on Vegas culture."

‘ARGYLLE’ WON’T BLOW YOUR SOCKS OFF

Elly Conway
ARGYLLE

A checkered mesh of mysteries have accompanied the release of Matthew Vaughn's "Argylle." There is the promoted one: Who is the "real" Agent Argylle? Then there's all the (baseless) conjecture over whether argyle aficionado Taylor Swift had anything to do with the film. But most of all: Why two L's? While we can finally put to rest the first two puzzles, we're left to posit that the spelling must be to differentiate the movie for those who just want to buy a pair of socks.

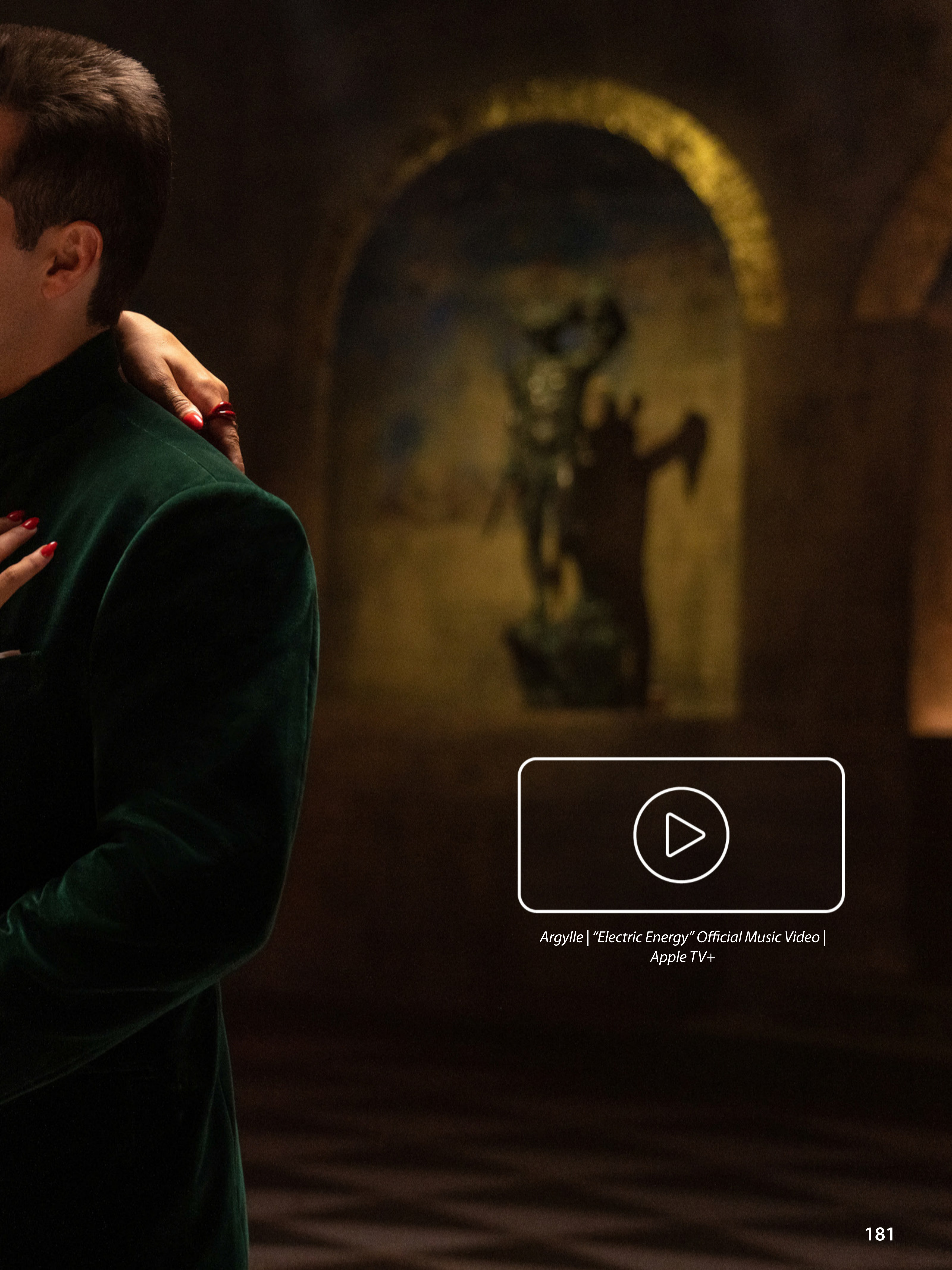
The socks would be a wiser investment. "Argylle," a $200 million production from Apple Films opening in theaters last week, is a big bet to kickstart a new spy series, presumably with iterations to follow such as "Plaidd" and "Herringbonne."

Criss-crossing patterns of ridiculousness and self-satisfaction run through "Argylle," a tiresome meta movie that puts an awful lot of zest into an awfully empty high-concept story.

There are all kinds of dumb movies. It can even be a good quality. "Step Brothers," for instance, is a brilliantly dumb movie. "Argylle" knows it's preposterous and it's trying to have fun with that. But it's a strained, unimaginative effort, over-reliant on twists and needle drops, that leaves "Argylle" on the bad side of dumb. The best that you can say about "Argylle" is that it comes by its dumbness genuinely.

Bryce Dallas Howard stars as Elly Conway, a bestselling spy novelist who lives quietly with her (CGI enhanced) cat, Alfie, while conjuring globe-trotting adventures for her agent Argylle. The movie's clunky prologue plunges us into his world, as Argylle (Henry Cavill) dances with

Argylle | Official Trailer | Apple TV+



Argylle | “Electric Energy” Official Music Video | Apple TV+

and then pursues a slinky target (Dua Lipa, whose few minutes in the film may be its best).

While Elly mulls a new ending for her fifth book, she's thrown into a real-world espionage thriller. While on the train, an actual, more scruffy-looking spy, Adrian (Sam Rockwell), approaches her just as mean-looking guys are closing in. Throughout the encounter, Elly blinks and sees Argylle in the place of Adrian, a bit of fiction-vs-reality that will play throughout "Argylle" in mostly uninteresting ways.

It's a premise familiar from better movies like "Romancing the Stone" or "The Lost City." But while those films filled their adventures with comedy, "Argylle" is surprisingly unfunny, a lacking Jason Fuchs' script tries to make up for with one switcheroo after another. Eventually, the whole movie feels like a joke, even if contains few of them.

The actors nearly keep the movie's absurd plate-spinning going. Among them are Bryan Cranston as the head of a shadowy organization called the Division, and Catherine O'Hara as Elly's mother. But roles are fluid in "Argylle." It's a testament to Howard's charm that "Argylle" is watchable, at all, and Rockwell, too, elevates the material.

Vaughn's knack for combining a smirky sense of humor with flashy, slo-mo ultra-violence has previously won him fans in the "Kingsman" film series. He delights in running spy tropes through an irreverent wringer. (If "Kingsman" was a 007 riff, "Argylle" cribs from "Bourne.") His movies, while often colorful and spirited, are slyly nasty with a slightly obnoxious juvenile underpinning of "can you believe I'm really doing this in a studio movie?"

Pork Kebab
Chicken
10
10

With enough plot twists to make a daytime soap blush, "Argylle" shows just how little that can add up to. You might think: spy movie, fun actors, pleasing diagonal lines — how bad can it be? As much as we all could use a fun movie for fun's sake, you, too, may have your concerns about the limits of such pointlessness around the time when Bryce Dallas Howard glides across an oil spill on skates of knives. Plus, no movie genuinely interested in a good time would dare not give Catherine O'Hara room to be funny. All she needs is an inch.

In the end, the mysteries that surrounded "Argylle" ahead of its release were far more intriguing than those that play out during its lengthy runtime. Those questions go more like: Are they really repeatedly using the Apple Music tie-in Beatles song "Now and Then"? And: This film can't be 139-minutes long, can it?

If there's one person who seems to have the right idea in "Argylle," it's, as usual, Samuel L. Jackson. He has some vague role that requires him to await an important transmission from Adrian. But this effectively means he spends much of the movie far from the action, drinking red wine and watching the Lakers game. Smart guy.

"Argylle," a Universal Studios/Apple Studios release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association for strong violence and action and some strong language. Running time: 139 minutes. One and a half stars out of four.

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THE OWNERS OF RUSSIA'S TECH PIONEER YANDEX ARE SELLING — AT A BIG, KREMLIN-REQUIRED DISCOUNT

The Dutch parent of pioneering Russian tech company Yandex is selling its operations in the country at a steeply discounted price of just over $5 billion to its Russia-based managers and oil company Lukoil, one of the biggest deals for Western-held companies to exit Russia since the invasion of Ukraine.

The price reflects a 50% discount that Moscow imposes on companies from "unfriendly" countries like the Netherlands as a condition of exiting business in Russia, according to a statement this week from Nasdaq-exchange listed Yandex NV.

It follows drawn-out negotiations that show the complexities international companies must navigate if they want to unload their Russian businesses, which many have been struggling to do since President Vladimir Putin's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine and the sweeping financial and economic sanctions that followed.

Yandex, founded in 1997 as Russia's answer to Google and Yahoo, serves Russian-speaking customers through its search engine and with widely used apps for food delivery, car-sharing and shopping.

Co-founder Arkady Volozh, who had earlier moved to Israel, resigned as CEO in 2022 after he was hit with European Union sanctions. He subsequently condemned Russia's invasion as "barbaric." The Nasdaq exchange suspended trading in Yandex shares days after the invasion.

"We can welcome the agreement reached by the shareholders on the sale," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in a conference call with reporters. "The company's Russian management will remain as the main owner. Of course, it's important

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for us that the company continues its operations in this sphere.

“We know that the negotiations were long, and we welcome their completion,” he added.

The sale in cash and shares worth 475 billion rubles would transfer Yandex’s core business — representing more than 95% of its revenue, assets and employees — to the group of up to 50 managers, Lukoil and business entities owned by investors Alexander Chachava, Pavel Prass and Alexander Ryazanov.

The 50% discounted sale price was based on the average value of Yandex shares on the Moscow exchange for the three months ending Jan. 31 — $10.2 billion. That’s after shares had already fallen by more than half in ruble terms since their peak before the invasion.

After the sale, Yandex NV would be left with its international businesses — employing 1,300 people — including self-driving technology and generative artificial intelligence as well as a data center in Finland.

Yandex NV Chairman John Boynton said the company had faced “exceptional challenges” since the start of the war.

“We believe we have found the best possible solution for our shareholders, our teams and our users in these extraordinary circumstances,” he said in a statement.

Boynton said the sale would “allow shareholders to recover some value for the businesses that we are divesting, while unlocking new growth potential for the international businesses we will retain.”

Hurdles for businesses to exit Russia include finding partners who are not under U.S. or European sanctions as well as avoiding banned financial transactions. None of the purchasers have been sanctioned, Yandex NV said, and the cash part of the transaction would be conducted in Chinese yuan outside of Russia.

Companies fleeing Russia not long after the war began ended joint ventures and wrote off stakes worth billions. For instance, McDonald's sold its 850 restaurants to a local franchisee, while France's Renault took a symbolic single ruble for its majority stake in Avtovaz, Russia's largest carmaker.

Others are still struggling to leave because of the hurdles put in place by Putin's government, and some are simply staying put.

The government also has seized assets or businesses belonging to Western corporations in Russia, including Danish beer maker Carlsberg's Baltika Breweries, French yogurt maker Danone, Finnish energy company Fortum and Germany's Uniper utility.

JAPAN GAME MAKER NINTENDO REPORTS SOLID PROFIT ON A JUMP IN SUPER MARIO SALES

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Nintendo reported healthy sales and profits on the back of the hit "Super Mario Bros. Wonder" game, prompting the Japanese video game maker to raise its full fiscal year forecasts.

Kyoto-based Nintendo Co. said this week that demand for what it called the first completely new Super Mario game in the series remained strong. Sales of the new Zelda game and "Pikmin 4" also surged.

More than 10.7 million units of the latest Super Mario game have been sold around the world since it went on sale in October, according to Nintendo.

It is banking on upcoming games like "Mario Vs. Donkey Kong" and "Princess Peach Showtime" to keep the sales momentum going.

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The weak yen also helped Nintendo's bottom line by boosting the value of its overseas revenue when converted into yen. The U.S. dollar has been trading at about 148 Japanese yen, up from 140 yen a year ago.

For the first nine months of the fiscal year, Nintendo earned 408 billion yen ($2.7 billion), up nearly 18% from 346 billion yen in the same period the year before. Nine-month sales rose 8% to 1.39 trillion yen ($9.4 billion).

Nintendo, which did not break down quarterly numbers, expects a full year profit of 440 billion yen ($3 billion), up from an earlier projection for a 420 billion yen ($2.8 billion) profit. Nintendo recorded nearly 433 billion yen in profit a year earlier.

Nintendo said theme parks like its offerings at Universal Studios in Japan are vital for keeping people informed about and interested in its franchise. The Super Nintendo World park is set to open next year in Florida.

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